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John Standish



A Story of THE HARROWING
OF LONDON. *By* E. GILLIAT, M.A.

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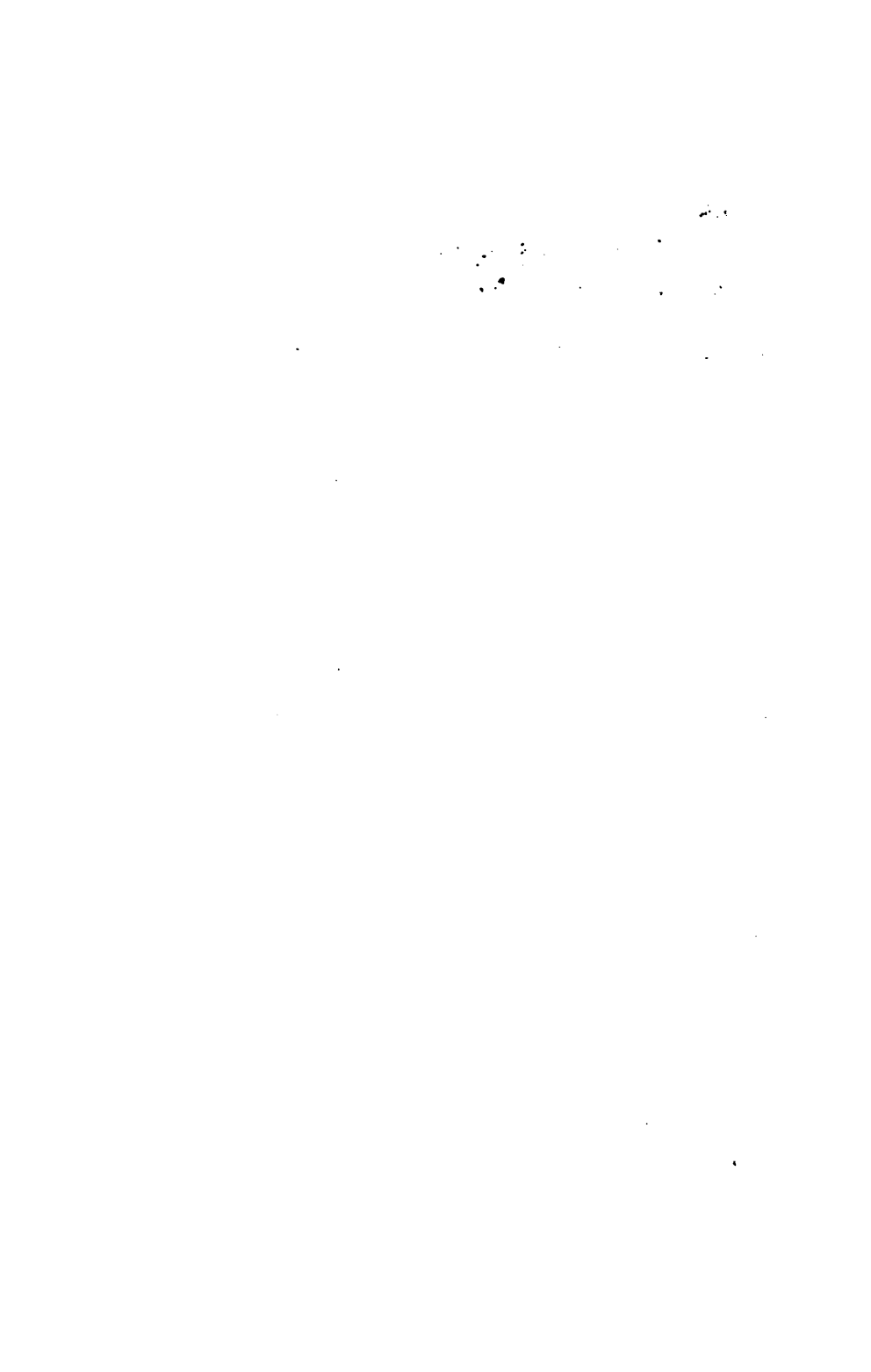
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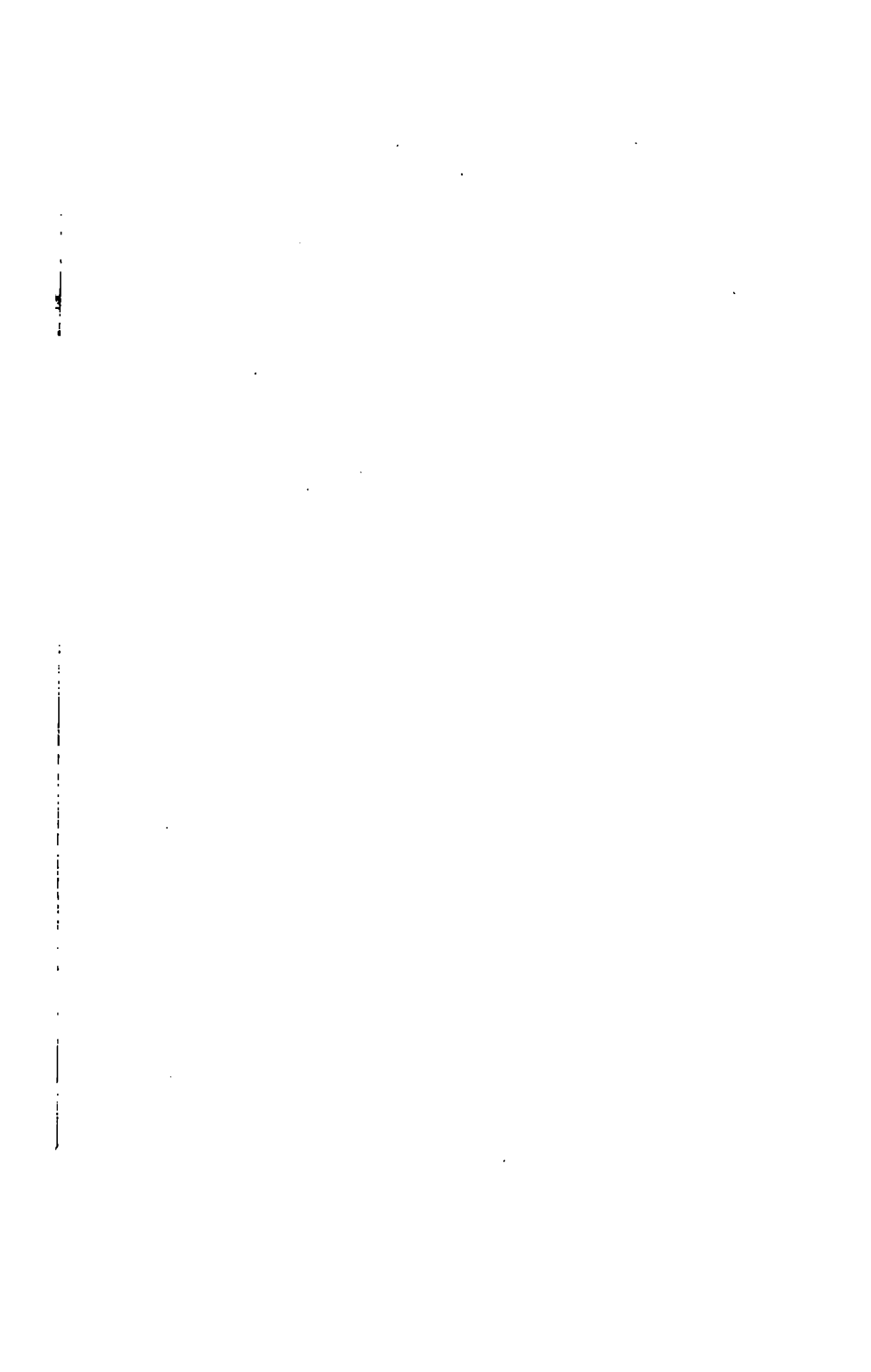
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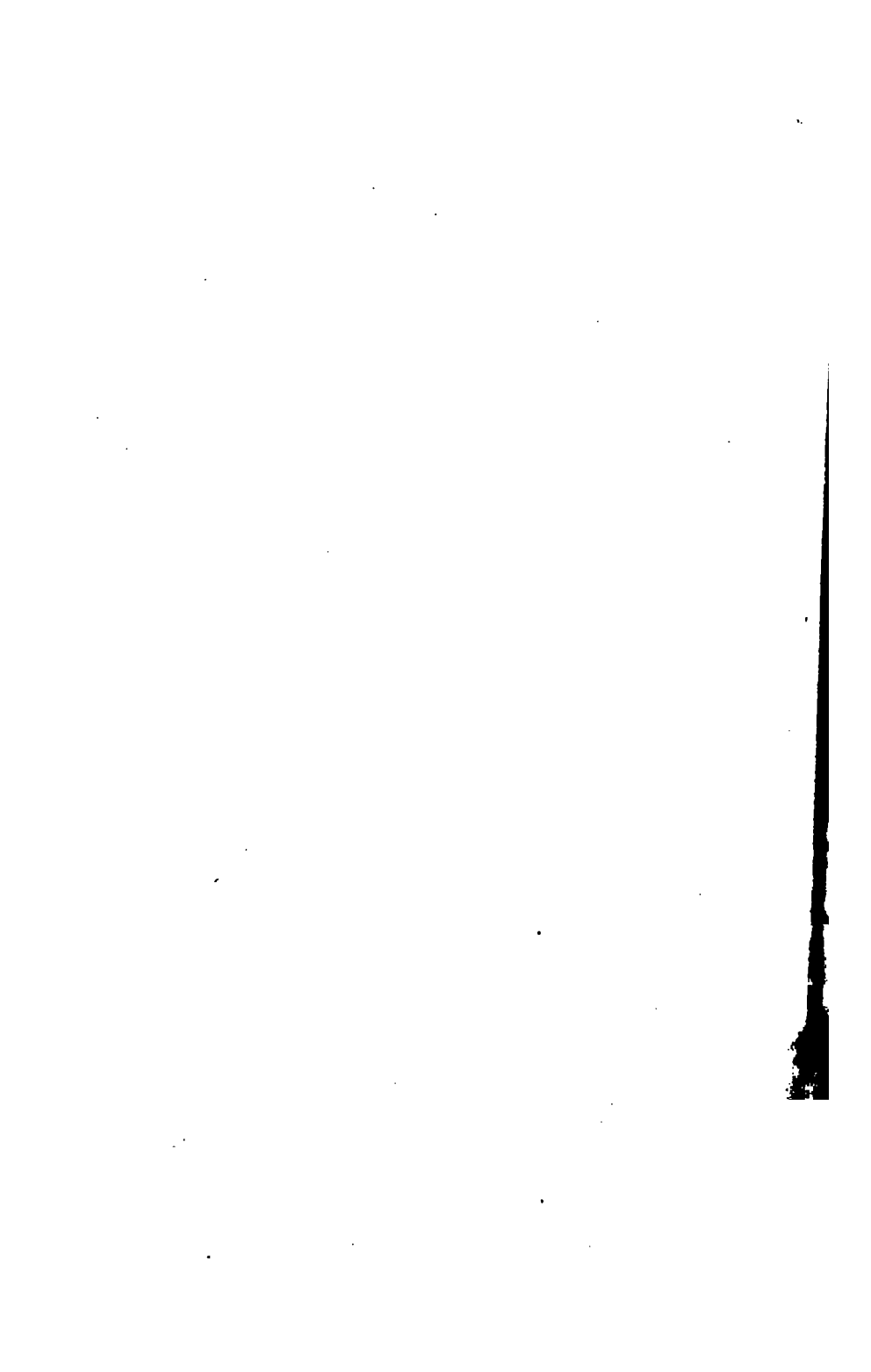


JOHN STANDISH.

—



ALURED AT ELTHAM PALACE.





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THE NEW YORK



John Standish

OR

THE HARROWING OF LONDON

BY THE

REV. E. GILLIAT, M.A.

Assistant-Master in Harrow School

AUTHOR OF 'FOREST OUTLAWS,' 'ASYLUM CHRISTI,' ETC.

The Lord that made of earthé earls,
Of the same earthé made He churls.'

ROBERT MANNING OF BOURNE.

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PARALLEL ORTHOGONAL

PREFACE.

THE characters in this story which are historical, besides those familiar to the reader, are John Standish, Dame Langland and Carlotta, the giant-monk of Westminster, Scogan, and the Abbots of Westminster and St. Albans.

Dean Stanley, in his 'Memorials of Westminster,' relates how the giant-monk was very popular with the citizens of London. He was also brave as well as big, for he obtained leave from his Superior to go down to Winchelsea and help to beat off the French privateers who were ravaging our south coast.

Langland, in his poem, calls his daughter Calote. He would have been the last person to imitate the Italians, yet I have ventured to call her Carlotta. Perhaps his dame may have had her way at the christening.

The dialogue is interspersed with old proverbs, quaint sayings, and allusions to old customs, all of which have been culled from writings of that age; for it seems to the Author more important to reproduce the very words and thoughts of the past than

to rely for a faithful picture on inventories of clothes and furniture.

Chaucer has been made to quote once or twice verses which had not then been published. May he not well have written sketches of some of his pilgrims long before he composed the whole?

The events of the three days' *Harrowing of London* are taken from Walsingham and Froissart, and the dialogue at Smithfield is taken entirely from those authorities.

The view of the Tower and old London Bridge is copied from a drawing in an old MS. at the British Museum.

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John Standish

OR

THE HARROWING OF LONDON.

CHAPTER I.

‘How now, Sibyl? it is a blush! I protest it is a blush.’

‘Nay, madame, so please you, it is but the summer sun. In sooth, and by my fay,* ye do me a wrong to make so merry over my brown cheek, and yon gay squire but a bow-shot distant.’

At this petulant reply there broke a merry ripple of laughter from the bevy of ladies who reclined on the sward within the pleasaunce of Eltham Palace, and from none more heartily than from the Princess Joanna of Kent, the widow of the Black Prince, and the mother of King Richard the Second.

It was the month of June, in the year 1380. The Princess and the ladies of her court had been amusing themselves under the shade of a giant elm, which grew on the green slope between the banquet-hall and the moat. To them, as they reclined, had come a young squire of honour from the Arch-

* Faith.

bishop's palace at Lambeth, bringing a letter for the young King.

The sudden sight of these gay damoiselles had dazzled the poor man's eyes, and robbed him of his ready wit. He had stood bowing and stammering his broken message before the whilom beauty of the court, now somewhat advanced in years—'The Fair Maid of Kent,' as the people had loved to call Princess Joanna—and she had bidden one of her young maids of honour, Sibyl de Feschamp, rise and conduct the abashed and bewildered youth into the King's presence.

It was upon her return from this mission that the Princess had bantered her upon her blushing face; but when Sibyl had put the blame upon the sunshine, they all cried out upon her.

'Hush!' said the Princess, holding up her white hand; 'let us try her in a Court of Love.'

'Yea, a court—a court!' echoed the laughing maidens.

'And I will be judge,' said the Princess, 'and Mary de Molyneux shall put her roundly to question; and for the rest, let us fancy we have donned the green kirtle and gold necklace, as the law doth enjoin. Now, Sibyl de Feschamp, stand forth!'

Then the accused girl stepped forth in front of the group of white-robed maidens, and, folding her arms demurely across her bosom, made two deep reverences right and left, and awaited the charge. The glancing sunbeams, as they stole between the moving foliage, lit up the gold of her wavy hair, which was enclosed in a dark net, from which

streamed the long contoise of purple silk in two falls behind her back. Her wimple had been discarded for the heat ; therefore, as she stood with a proud smile bending into a bow her pretty, rose-bud mouth, the whole of her face was exposed to her judges—the low, wide forehead, and gray-blue eyes, the ‘tip-tilted’ nose and scornful lips, and—what gave most character to her fair young face—the constant shifting of her gaze, with a look in her sidelong glances which seemed to say, ‘A pretty piece of womanhood, I am well advised, but I would the admiring world should be conscious of it withal!’

But Mary de Molyneux, a laughing, rosy girl of some seventeen years old or more, stood up facing her, and said :

‘In the name of our Court of Love, and of all true lovers of minstrelsy and the maistry of song, I adjure thee, Sibyl de Feschamp, to tell our mistress truly what hath passed between thee and this squire.’

‘What hath passed between us? What but the languor of a sultry air and some foolish motes that frolicked in the golden sunbeam?’

The girls rustled in their white samite, and clapped hands at the ready wit of their companion, while Mary de Molyneux bit her lip in vexation. But, encouraged by the Princess, she returned to the charge.

‘What was the matter of your discourse? How fell it out?’

‘We talked of trifles—no matter worth the telling—a poor smattering of courteous interrogatives—and as yet have we fallen not out.’

‘No, that I’ll warrant! but thou hast spread a net for the poor fool, and, boy-like, he hath fallen in.’

‘Aye, fathom-deep he lies, drownèd in a maiden’s eyes, entangled in her silken lashes, crying for a hand that shall bear him up. . . .’

‘Hush, idle prattler!’ said the Princess, interrupting her, ‘thou answerest not according to usage of the court; and, were it not that thou camest to us with the symbol of modesty flaming on thy brow, I should be fain to think that he had asked of thee a salute.’

‘Benedicite! Oh, my gracious lady, fie for the shame thereof!’

Sibyl made a reverence deep to the ground, and her fair face and neck blushed again at the imputation of such frowardness.

‘Silence again, I command!’ cried the Princess. ‘Did he not offer to be thy troubadour and indite thee sonnets? Yea or nay?’

‘Nay, sweet lady; the poor, bashful youth could only glance sideways at me, and stammer, and break short off, and cough, and grow crimson.’

The mortified tone in which this was spoken made them laugh merrily: it tickled them the more that they knew Sibyl to be an inconstant damoiselle, more intent on winning favour than on keeping it when wisely and modestly won.

‘But tell me, par Charité! tell me, if this be the case with the timid innocent, how came it that thy cheek was all aflame with blood?’

‘Yea, struck in Mary de Molyneux, ‘and have a

care thy tongue speak no leasing,* lest thou be chastised of thy betters.'

Sibyl retorted petulantly:

'It was no blush of modesty for soft word uttered, but a hue of indignant shame, that the golden-haired fool should so far mar his pretty face by lenten† answers rudely mouthed.'

Thereat a great cry of triumph arose, when these careless minions of the court perceived the discomfiture of their sister; but when Princess Joanna saw the tears come into Sibyl's eyes, she held up her hand, saying:

'A truce to further bickering—the jest is ended. Ye know the proverb, "Sooth bourde is no bourde."‡ Had it been a case of playful love, where the poet's imagination serves instead of passion, then would we probe this wound to the quick; but if it be that the silly wench loves in good sooth this springald from Lambeth . . .'

'Madame! he cometh at hand! I pray thee lower thy voice.'

It was too true. The rest could scarce suppress a titter as they spied a long pair of legs stalking swiftly across the lawn.

As the young squire, however, drew nearer, he seemed abashed by the presence of so much beauty, and would have turned had not the Princess made a sign to him to approach.

He bowed low before her, until his long yellow hair, slightly curling, fell forward and well-nigh hid his foolish blushes.

* Lies.

† Stinted.

‡ 'Jesting in earnest is no jest at all.'

‘They might be brother and sister,’ whispered the Princess. ‘Two golden flowers, but unequally mated; for one hath seen the world, and the other hath not.’

There was a silence of some seconds, while the young squire shifted from foot to foot uneasily under scrutiny of those merry, bright eyes. He had placed some roses in the breast of his short tunic to grace the occasion; he had donned his gayest tunic of green silk, embroidered front and back with white and red flowers, as the fashion was, and his finely-proportioned legs were set off by tightly-fitting stockings of pale blue silk; his sleeves, which were long and wide, were parti-coloured of vair and black, while his long shoes, pointed and curling upwards at the toe, were slashed after the manner then known as ‘Paul’s windows.’

The ladies took in these gracious features at a glance, but they did not less admire the elegant figure of the young man than his gay attire. For he had thrown back his hood upon his shoulders, and they could gaze upon the fair face and light moustache, the waving line of hair drawn from the brow, and the head circled by a tiny thread of gold to keep all the tresses neat and orderly.

It was a pretty, girlish face, not strong enough to please a woman. The nose was too small, the mouth weak and apt to smile where no smile was. But it made a pretty picture; and the fair Maid of Kent sighed as she thought of her own son, Richard, now but fifteen years old, just so pretty and waxen and doll-like, just so vain of his attire as this youth

seemed to be—and she prayed to herself (for she had her serious moments now) that the young King might grow in moral stature and prove himself a worthy son of her loved and lamented lord, the Black Prince.

‘So! thou hast seen the King, Master Squire—what name shall I say?’

‘Alured of Dene, my gracious lady. I have given his Highness the packet entrusted to me by my master.’

‘Ah! thou hast seen my son,’ resumed the Princess, abstractedly gazing on the shifting colours that played upon the cheek of the youth.

‘Madame, shall we stay him further?’ at last whispered Mary de Molyneux, as the moments passed and the young squire did not know whether to go or stay.

‘I crave thy pardon, Master Alured of Dene; in sooth thou favourest* so the King, my son, that it set me dreaming on far-off matters. But thou hast seen him? With what affairs was he employed?’

The squire hesitated and murmured:

‘His Highness was engaged with Sir Alberic de Vere, as I trow.’

‘Oh! then the affair was of no high statecraft, I wis. What did they?’

‘Methinks they were reckoning up moneys, madame.’

‘With cards on the table?’

‘With some such toys of fashion, madame, if I mistake not.’

‘It likes me not to find my son’s friends thus leading his trustful innocence into a path that too oft

* Resemblest.

leadeth to unthrift. Mark me, Sir Squire, 'twere well that they who come to court should see as though they saw not, for when trivial slips of the tongue get blown about in the rude world yonder, they grow to a head and work evil to those in power. Dost thou take me,* or must I speak more plainly ?'

'I were a fool to mistake it, madame.'

'Well—let us to our mirth anon; chance it we can get from the squire what we could not get from the maid. My minion here, the Lady Sibyl de Feschamp, came back from escorting thee with her cheek aflame. She would have us believe thou art more wanton than thy looks would argue. Now, any license in this our palace of Eltham . . .'

'Oh! my most gracious lady, the Lady Sibyl must wrong me; for all that passed between us was . . .'

Sibyl hereupon coughed and essayed to interrupt the squire. Howbeit she was caught in the act, and put to penance by being ordered to stand up with her back to the company.

'And now, say on, Master Squire,' said Princess Joanna, with a merry glance of meaning at her maids of honour.

But Alured hesitated and played nervously with the hatched knife that hung from his neck, for he had sense enough to see that it were an unknighly thing to wound the girl's feelings.

'Well, the saints help thee to a readier wit, Master Squire!' said the Princess, when she had waited in vain for a reply.

'Amen!' said Sibyl in a deep contralto, and with

• Comprehend.

such unction of fervour that even Alured joined in the laugh against himself.

‘I shall put my minion to some penance for this superfluity of naughtiness. Sibyl, thou wilt take it upon thee to bring this goodly youth unto the outer barbican beyond the moat, for by the coming and going of his colour I gather that it is now high summer in his veins and pale winter in the brain of him. Go! Sir Squire, back to thy master, the good Archbishop, whom thou servest so modestly and even bashfully. The Lady Sibyl shall show thee forth out of the pleasaunce, and—to make propriety the more secure for thy blushing innocence—Mary de Molyneux and Editha of Andover shall haunt somewhere at call not far from thy steps. Now go!’

The tone of sarcasm completed the discomfiture of the poor youth, who turned sadly on his heel and walked silently by Sibyl’s side towards the bridge.

‘Come, come! Sir Squire, be not cast down,’ said Sibyl encouragingly; ‘we all have to endure these gusts of temper from our mistress; and, in sooth, I owe thee much for not revealing my fond and foolish request.’

‘You owe me nothing, lady. It is I who owe you something for teaching me court manners, which his Grace of Canterbury hath omitted in me.’

Sibyl laughed a merry laugh. She might snake-like wriggle out of the false position into which she had before betrayed herself.

And now they had come to the centre of the bridge which spanned the moat. A few paces more, and they must needs part.

Sibyl lingered with one arm on the stone balustrade, and, looking down into the clear water that lay far below and mirrored waving tree and the blue sky and the pointed arches of the bridge and the pigeons that flew swiftly over the moat, she cried :

‘Look ! Master Alured of Dene ; there is a current saying here that whoso gazeth from this bridge with a clean heart shall read his future in the mirror of yon glassy wave.’

Alured laughed uneasily and approached the side of the bridge. The water lay sleeping below in a breathless calm, the steep banks were covered with trees and bushes, while verdant interspaces of smooth sward lent a brighter colour here and there. Apple-blossom still hung upon the boughs and relieved the sombre tints of foliage in shade.

‘Well ! seest thou aught in the mirror ?’ said Sibyl, leaning over the parapet and peering down.

‘Yea—but—but—but . . .’

‘Three buttes ? Then must thou be a bad marksman, an thou drive not thy shaft home into the prickles,* good sir. But soothly, why dost thou hesitate ? What hast thou seen, or failed of seeing ?’

‘St. Denis ! I would rather not speak of it. But to speak pert† and open, I did not see the face I looked for !’

‘Bencite !’‡ murmured Sibyl, as she bit her lip with vexation. ‘But tell me : of what fashion was the face thou didst seek ?’

* Target.

† Pert or aperte, openly.

‡ Short for Benedicite.

'A young face, full of dignity and grace—something statue-like.'

'And didst thou not see such a maiden's face below?'

'I saw none but thine, Mistress Sibyl; which made me uneasy, for I am half promised to a young maid in the City yonder.'

Sibyl laughed, but there was mischief in the gleam of her eyes.

'A maid in the City! But, Sir Squire, such a minion can be no equal match for one who shall be knight in his Grace's guard.'

'So my friends say,' replied Alured, smiling weakly at the empty compliment. 'But the young maid passeth all the maids in London for form and comeliness. You should see her—you should . . .'

The enthusiastic but simple lover suddenly paused as he saw the angry flush again mount into the brow of the court beauty.

'Oh yes, certes! I should see this paragon of charms—no doubt of it. For, perchance, thou wilt go hence and tell her how the Lady Sibyl of Feschamp proposed to her betrothed that he should be her troubadour, and praise her loveliness in ballad and sonnet. And did I not explain to this City wench that such trifling had no meaning beyond the poetic fashion of the day, she also might think Sibyl of Feschamp was a froward wanton, and scorn me for my light behaviour.'

'Oh! Mistress Sibyl, I never thought on such wise. Howbeit, when thou didst ask me with such witching smile and a glance of thy blue eyes that ran through my heart like the blue blade of a misericorde* if I

* Dagger of pity, that puts hurt things out of their pain.

would care to be thy troubadour, I confess that I, in my ignorance, was for thinking that troubadour was but "lover" writ large.'

'And so thy honest heart, being indignant at the suggestion of treason, sent forth a grim, uncourtly defiance to poor me, making me hie back to my companions with a flaming cheek, for the very shame.'

At this moment a merry laugh sounded from beneath the bridge, and a punt shot through the archway into the sunlight.

'We could not help hearing you, for you spake so loud,' cried Mary de Molyneux from her cushions, while Editha of Andover went on laughing so merrily that the pigeons flew up from the elms, and circled twice round the gate-tower ere they alighted again.

'Gramercy!' muttered Sibyl; 'as old Adam the gardener saith, "Words breeden bale;"* they will make a fine story of all this, and I shall get well laughed at—and all because I took pity on thy bashful face. Go, Sir Squire, and make my devoir to thy pretty City wench; but—but, an thou wilt not be my troubadour, yet think not lightly of one who has braved the scorn of the court for thy sake.'

'Lady,' said Alured, bowing low, 'I am all too unworthy of this high condescension; yet if thou wilt choose me for thy troubadour . . .'

'By no means; that chance hath gone by, par ma foi! Farewell, Sir Squire.'

Sibyl tripped away, leaving Alured confused and blushing, and a little vainer than he had been before.

* Breed mischief.

CHAPTER II.

WHILST Alured of Dene was riding with his two body-servants along the Blackheath Road from Eltham to Lambeth, two gossips, in an upper room in Cornhill, were discussing his merits.

The two women so engaged were Mistress Kit Langland, wife of the now famous author of 'The Vision of Piers Ploughman,' and Marjorie, her friend and gossip, or sponsor, to Carlotta, the only daughter of Will Langland. They were sitting on stools in the embrasure of the great open window, which bulged out over the street of Cornhill. Between them was a small table, on which were parchments, ink and pumice; the room was barely furnished forth with a couple of large chests, bookshelves, stools, and trestles for a portable table; the interior was somewhat dark, as the sides of the recess in which the window was set were so deep that much of the daylight was intercepted. Outside there was a hum of voices arising from the busy throng below, who were clearing away their booths from the Cornhill Market, while the young girls on their way to the fountain were stopping to bandy light words with the apprentices, and holding their pitchers with one hand uplifted to their head, while

with the other they gesticulated and emphasized the merry quip or shout of scorn. All this the two gossips were intently watching from the window, but at last Dame Langland withdrew into the corner of the embrasure and sighed.

Dame Langland had been a beauty in her day, dark and deadly with her piercing black eyes; but just now her bloom had faded with the worry of life, the olive cheek had turned just a trifle sallow, and the beautiful raven hair was faintly tinged with streaks of gray.

She sighed, then, and sighed ever more fervently, yet still Dame Marjorie's plump, waxen head remained thrust forth of the window; so from sighing Dame Langland fell to sniffing—sniffing in all its modulated cadences, from the pensive, through the surprised and vexed, up to the sharp, short sniff that spoke of an irritability which it would be a parlous* thing to overlook. And when her nasal organ reached this scale, Dame Marjorie turned her round and sat her down, saying:

'Sonties! what a time your Carlotta is gone! If I were you, I would let† her from walking the streets at eventide. The young men are so froward.'

'Ah!' sighed the other, 'an we were rich, it might be done; but "Long Will," as they call my William, hath little to spare for food and lodging, tho' he hath the finest bass voice in London, and kens Westminster law as well as the best of them. Ah! Marjorie, your man is a mercer, and of great credit in the City, but mine is a poor losel, who wastes

* Perilous.

† Prevent.

half his time at the ale,* a-singing of burdens and catches and glees.'

'Nay, gossip; thou wrongest thy good man; for I have heard John of Canterbury—that giant, you know, among the Westminster monks . . .'

'Dant John! Aye, I ken him well enough, for he cometh here not seldom.'

'Well, sweetheart, I've heard him tell how thy "Long Will" hath writ a poem will make no small stir in the world; in sooth, 'tis much talked of in the town.'

'Ah!' sighed Mistress Langland, lifting her fine eyes mournfully to heaven, 'tis the making and the composing and the copying and the bettering which makes my life so hard. Now, there's Lottie yonder—he keeps her at this table copying and drawing, and drawing and copying all daylight, I do protest and vow! The poor girl waxes whiter and whiter, and still her pen must go. And such stuff, Dame Marjorie! Such parlous ribaldry about poor men being starved, and about bishops and abbots thinking on surfeit and luxury; and such ribald heresies, too, such as "To do well is better than a sackful of pardons all hot from Rome." Why! 'tis enough to send him to the pillory, and poor Lottie and me to the thewes.†

'Come, come! thou didst ever sit hard on Will. But if Dan John is not good enough for thee, let me tell thee that Master Geoffrey Chaucer, the friend of John of Gaunt—or King of Castille, if it like thee

* Ale-house.

† Short for Dominus.

‡ Stool of repentance for women.

better—even he, who hath no mean skill in the making of verse . . .’

‘Oh! I have no opinion of Master Geoffrey’s verse. He but copies the Frenchmen, and he were better employed minding his work at the Customs.’

‘Well, but there is more ; for I have heard tell that his Grace of Canterbury hath been seen to laugh over the quaint thoughts in “Piers Ploughman.”’

‘Ah! it will be time to laugh when Will sees the gold come in ; but for my part, I don’t hold to such goings on. Carlotta should be mending shifts, not copying her father’s verses and law parchments. Ah! we should be well-to-do folk if I had my way ; but thou kenst the ways of men, Marjorie. It is, “How now, sweetheart! art aweary? What should women know of such matters?” And then if one should go to be round with them, it is “By Saint Mango! stint thy clappe,”* or “Get thee gone, Kit, and blabber over thy beads;” so that we poor women get only flouted for our pains.’

Dame Marjorie shook her flaxen curls reprovingly, and setting her wimpie, said :

‘There’s one thing, neighbour—all this coil about “Piers Ploughman” fetches many a brave young gallant up this ladder, I ween, eh?’

‘A truce! Marjorie, if thou thinkest they come here to prattle with Lottie, thou art muckle mista’en. Never was there such a pair of innocents as Will and his daughter. She is cold as the fountain yonder.’

‘I dare avow it ; but they do say that the young squire from Lambeth, who haunteth† here, hath less skill in letters than in love.’

* Stop your chattering.

† Cometh often.

‘Then they speak leasing, I tell thee. When I am in the chamber, not a word of folly passeth his lips.’

‘That I can believe; but—well! ’tis like enough he may learn some smattering of letters that way, and, by St. Loy! if he is not taking a lesson from her now. Look forth, neighbour; look forth and see for thyself.’

Dame Langland leaned forth and saw the Archbishop’s livery, the two body-servants, and one led horse richly caparisoned; and there, quietly pacing down the street towards the fountain, was her own Carlotta, tall and graceful, while the gay young squire walked by her side and was evidently making mirth over some story which he was recounting. The apprentices doffed cap, or made a leg;* for the beautiful Carlotta was the pride of Cornhill, and her sweet, pensive face, with its witching smile, had charmed the rudest heart in London town. But there were some faces that wore a look of envy, and some old heads nodded too wisely, and some broad shoulders were shrugged mysteriously, as the gallant and the soberly-clad maid paced slowly to the fountain.

Carlotta seemed unconscious of the stir in the market, for her face was lifted in a rapt attention and her eyes were fixed upon the spire of St. Paul’s Cathedral, as she pictured to herself the scene at Eltham, which Alured had been describing for her amusement.

‘But I have not told thee how I put my foot into it with the pretty maid-of-honour.’

* Bowed, scraping the foot backward.

‘Yea? Was that she who brought thee to the young King?’

‘The same, Carlotta: she was observing me with more than maidenly observance, as I thought—and thou knowest how I hate to be made up to, as though I were a child under the yerde.* Well! I made as though I saw not her simperings and her oglings until she fairly besought me would I be her troubadour, and make her some songs of amour!’

‘Oh! Master Alured, it was not meet to be so unchastised of tongue.’

‘That is what I thought, and so I made bold to give her a sharp retort; for I said brusquely, “Nay; lady, that can I never do; for the sweet maid whom I court liveth hard by in the City yonder. I pray thee, have me excused.”’

‘Saidst thou indeed so?’ asked Carlotta, flushing from cheek to brow.

‘Aye, in good sooth did I—and thou shouldst have seen how this misproud Sibyl de Feschamp turned haughtily on her heel: it was as good as a scepe in a miracle play on Corpus Christi day.’

But Alured did not tell Carlotta how he had craved pardon on the bridge, pleaded ignorance of courtly usages, and offered to be her troubadour, and how she had waived him away incontinently.

Yet, though he did not tell this, his heart misgave him, and he sank into a momentary absorption, in which conscience pricked him, love upbraided him, and honour called him a traitor.

‘But what writest thou?’ he suddenly asked of Carlotta.

* The rod at school.

She replaced her tablets in her bosom, and said with a sad smile :

‘Sibyl de Feschamp’s name might escape my memory, therefore have I noted it down ; but may I presume on a pretty long acquaintance to ask who is the City minion who enjoys thy worship ?’

Alured looked at Carlotta, but her dark eyes were bent on the ground.

‘Shall I describe her favour* to thee ? Haply thou mayest not know her, Carlotta !’

Still there was no smile in Carlotta’s face, only a marble stillness in the finely-chiselled features—a look, Alured thought, of sad disdain.

‘Yes—speak on,’ she said slowly ; ‘for never yet hast thou revealed to me the secret which was so frankly unfolded to this court lady, so fair and fetise.’†

‘Sickerly,‡ yea ; else is my tongue a truant to my will. But an it like thee to hear me spell over her features—the features of the only maid I have ever really loved, Carlotta—then mark my tale. She is passing tall ; stately in walk, as one who could carry a trencher on her head without a fall ; her neck is long, and yet full and white, as it were a marble pilaster cut from the Church of the Knights Hospitallers yonder. Then her face, Carlotta—well ! her face is somdel§ grave and pensive, with a mouth curved like Cupid’s bow, dropping, as it were, scornfully at the two corners. Her nose is straight and Grecian, with subtle chisellings which go to suggest the distinctive

* Appearance.

‡ Surely.

† From *factus*, well-made.

§ Something.

character of the face. Her eyebrows are black and strongly-marked, and her long, dark eyelashes serve to veil the pathos or the humour of her tell-tale eyes. Her hair is raven-black, cut short about the temples, like a boy's, but gathered into a coil as of rope, just where one would have loved to kiss her neck. When I first saw her, I thought the face too cold and proud, but since I have had the privilege of seeing her in her own house, and of hearing her speak on matters near her heart, I have noted how the cold marble of her mask could melt into witching tenderness, or fire into generous indignation at a tale of wrong. In sooth, she is my goddess; for from her I have learned that life has high aims as well as idle toys of lust, and in her presence I understand better what our Master Chaucer intends, when he sings of the daisy as the type of womanhood—white purity surrounds her: within is a heart of gold.'

'I know no such young girl within the City bounds, sir,' said Carlotta, playing absently with her string of beads.

'No? Ah! thou hast not heard her spoken of by them that knew her worth, perchance. Her mother, for example, clepes* her "a lissom wench, buxome,† but somdel smutterlich."†'

'Go to! Thou hast been fooling me, Sir Squire, to talk thus in terms of minstrelsy. I am but a poor City maid, unworthy, in the world's eye, to hold equal converse with such as thou. And, soothly, look around! The neighbours are condemn-

* Calls.

† Obedient.

‡ Rather a brunette.

ing me for my light 'haviour in listening so long to thy speech. Good-den* to thee, Master Alured, and seek thou me no more.' So with a stately reverence, the coolness of which was sorely belied by a pair of pleading eyes, Carlotta turned to enter her father's house.

As she emerged from the shadow of the ladder or stairs into the room, looking like an Italian maiden, such was the wealth of her dark colouring of hair and eyes, Dame Marjorie exclaimed :

'Why, Carlotta, thy mother hath been heavily travailing,† because thou stoodest so long yonder by the fountain.'

'Madame, I cry you mercy!' rejoined Carlotta, making a ceremonious reverence before the stranger. 'I did not mark your presence at first.'

'Daughter,' said Dame Langland, with a vexed frown, 'I wonder even thy ignorance of the world did not discern that all Cornhill was agape to see thee gibbering with yon gay gallant.'

'Nay, dame, chide her not,' said Marjorie, 'for that she is full sely‡ I am sure.'

'Yea, but young maids mote§ not only be sely, they shall also seem so.'

'That is known by belief, dear mother, and I trow it is good policy. Yea, it irketh me to think I have done a fond|| thing.' Carlotta stooped and kissed her mother. 'He was telling me of the fine sayings yonder at Eltham Palace, where he has seen the King and had speech with the Fair Maid of Kent.'

* Good-even.

† Vexed.

‡ Innocent, simple.

§ Must.

|| Foolish.

'Grammercy, child! call him within. Dame Marjorie would fain hear how they were adorned and pranked,* I'll be bound.'

'I can do no such thing, mother. Folk would think I had gone stark wode,† running down the street after the Archbishop's squire.'

'Ah, ah! fond wench! so thou hast awoke to a sense of what is fitting at last. Now go down to the kitchen and get thy father's supper ready.'

'I don't marvel at the young man's folly,' said Dame Marjorie when Carlotta had left the chamber, 'for it is the face of an angel.'

'Somdel smutterlich, Dame Marjorie, somdel smutterlich. I think the colour of my neck and arms was better than hers when I was a girl.'

'Ah, neighbour! But there is something far-off like, rapt, poetic, or angelic, in that sweet girl's face which she gets from her father, and——'

'Oh! Peter! don't talk to me of rapture and poetic frenzy. It's impossible for any person who has kindly wit‡ to get along with such untoward folk. Good husbandry§ seemeth beneath the notice of such angels. I'll ha' none of it. Why! 'twas but the other day I sent her forth in quest of some eggs, which you know are fivepence the hundred, and a few fardels to light the kitchen fire. Well! if she did not pay two groats|| for the eggs, and leave the fardels under the pyning-stool,¶ where she stopped to cry over an old witch who had been taken for selling loaves under weight.'

* Adorned.

† Mad.

‡ Common-sense.

§ Economy.

|| Groat, 4d.

¶ Punishment.

‘ Dear heart ! but what shall be the end of this courtship ? If I were thou I would bid the gallant to the house on St. John’s Eve to see the pageants.’

‘ A good thought, neighbour. Wilt make one ?’

‘ Agreed. This window is full roomy for seeing abroad.’

‘ But I must not suffer my Will to get wind of this quarry, else will he wind a recheat,* for he aye abhorreth such things.’

‘ And yet, an I be not deceived, ’twould not be so far out of his degree if he did marry with thy daughter, for the Langlands were a braw good family out in the West; and who is this young squire?’

‘ That we will try and find out, Dame Marjorie.’

* Recall the dogs.

CHAPTER III.

ON the morrow of the day following Alured's ride to Eltham, that young squire was singing to himself, 'Come hider, love, to me,' as he burnished his armour in the chamber devoted to the squires and pages at Lambeth Palace, the town-residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury.

As he sang and rubbed, a little boy, dark-haired and large-eyed, looked in at the open door, then hid behind the wall and marred all Alured's sweet upper notes by bawling in ungracious cadence :

'If thou be proud of thy good song.
Seldè lasteth that virtue long :
Singer hath heartè proud within,
And teacheth many a one to sin.'

Alured let fall the harness with a jangle on the wooden seat, ran off, and caught the offender by the sleeve.

'Ah ! Willie, is it thou, Master Malapert ? So thou thinkest I may teach folk to sin, dost thou ? Come ! that is all too ungentle, seeing that it was of thy sister I was singing just now.'

'My sister, Carlotta ? Who gave thee leave to make my sister's name common ?'

'I did not ask thy leave, Willie ; but I would be

friends with thee, maugre* thy petulant ways. Come! wilt have me for a brother?’

‘I would liefer have John Standish.’

‘Ho, there!’ said a second squire, entering at that moment; ‘to what office am I to be chosen by this young varlet’s suffrages?’

‘E’en to the wedding of his pretty sister,’ said Alured, laughing.

But Willie’s eyes were filling with tears; he loved Carlotta, and her memory was to him like the image of Saint Catherine. He could not bear this ribaldry.

The second squire, John Standish, seemed to note this trouble in the child’s mind, for he motioned to Alured to keep silence, and said to the boy:

‘Let it not reck† thee, youngster; no one shall sully the name of thy sister in John Standish’s presence.’

‘I thank thee, Master John; I will tell Carlotta that her cause is upheld by the strongest arm south of Thames. And do thou, Master Alured of Dene, cease thy carolling, save thou have meet license thereto.’

The little boy gravely lifted his forefinger as a menace and left the chamber, while the two squires could not help laughing aloud at his expense.

‘There now,’ said Alured, ‘yon little caitiff shall go home and mar all my prospects in Cornhill.’

‘Yea, and get me set down for his brother-in-law, as one should order a trussed capon for the Sunday.’

‘But, gravely, John, I do love this girl, par amour.’

* In spite of.

† Do not care.

‘And, gravely, Alured, I do not love this girl, whose to-name* even I do not know.’

‘Why, the boy is a son of Long Will, the burden-singer† at Paul’s, and poet.’

‘Whew! How cometh it, then, that thou art making love out of thy degree?’

‘What is that to thee? Art thou my Father Confessor?’

‘No,’ said Standish sternly, and his brown eyes kindled with wrath; ‘but thou and I shall soon be sworn at the altar to defend the weak, as true knights, and I for one may not see this little child’s sister wronged.’

‘Tush! wrong was never intended. I tell thee, I love her, and would make her my bride—if she had dowry enough to please my guardian.’

‘Good; I retract my hasty words,’ and John Standish held out his hand, which Alured grasped very amicably.

Indeed, they had been always good friends, ever since John Standish had thrashed Master Alured all round Fulham parish years ago, when both were little pages to Simon of Sudbury, then Bishop of London. Though not so tall as Alured, John Standish was far stronger, and possessed besides a more powerful will, a strength of character, and a moral earnestness to which Alured was a stranger.

The face of Standish looked somewhat rugged, dark and stern; but under the rough exterior beat a very warm heart, as the grasp of his hand, the kindling kindness of his eye, and the sweet homeliness

* Surname.

† Bass.

of his smile were apt to testify. After a momentary silence he said:

‘I would fain see this fere* of thine, if thou canst trust me so far.’

‘Heartily. Why not take a wherry, and go thither before vespers?’

‘It likes me much. Then shall I see with mine own eyes how the wind sits; for I should be wonder-sorry that the poor child’s heart should be broken by any silken dalliance with his sister. It is a cruel thing to send a trustful maid to pipe† in an ivy-leaf.’

‘Yea, John, I am with thee there. But why lookest thou thus?’

‘I was wondering if I could intrust to thee a message to someone, as thou seemest so rare in dealing with the fair sex.’

‘What? John Standish fallen in, fathom-deep, too! Oh, splendid atrocity!’

‘Hush! thou wilt call his grace from the library. The fact is, I had a long talk with one of Princess Joan’s maids-of-honour last week, and—and I have not felt well ever since.’

‘Ha, ha! a little off thy feed, John; I take it well enough. And who may the young maiden be?’

‘Thou wilt swear on this crossed hilt not to reveal it to any?’

‘Yea, I swear it. There!’

‘Because I am something ashamed of my folly. And oftentimes I try to persuade myself that she would not make a plain fellow like me a good, constant wife; and then again I get dreaming of her

* Lover.

† To brood over disappointment.

o' nights, and even when I tell my beads, or sing the psalms in chapel, I catch myself thinking on her. And, as I said before, I begin to feel uncanny, and as if it would come to leech-craft, or a shrewd letting of blood.'

'Well-a-day! thou art in a parlous state, friend John.'

'I trow so. And yestereven I consulted the hermit who lives on London Bridge, and he was strong for my offering the maid my troth.'

'Even so; and I am to deliver thy message? And she is . . . ?'

'The Lady Sibyl de Feschamp, a fair, golden-haired maid.'

'No! The Lady Sibyl! Impossible!'

'Why impossible?' asked Standish, instinctively feeling for his sword.

'Because—because—oh! I wot not why—but it all seems so strange. I was talking to her yesterday, and she never—John, forgive me, but she never once syllabled thy name.'

'The Saints bless her, body and soul! No, nor should I have mentioned hers, had not thy ready tongue seemed to me the fittest means of conveying my loving message.'

Still Alured hesitated, and whistled faintly, 'Come hider, love, to me.'

'I avow, John, I do not think my tongue the meetest channel between her and thee. What! kenst thou not that a woman loves not wooing by proxy? Think on it, John; speak thou for thyself.'

'Never; I should die in the breach! Suppose

she gainsaid me, and would ha' none o' my wooing, Alured ?'

'Why, then thou mightest hie thee home and get thee anon to bed.'

John Standish shook his head. There were few perils he dared not face ; but to meet this girl and avow his love—this was for John Standish a trial to which his nerves were utterly unequal.

'Come! consent to do my bidding, for I have heard his grace say that to-morrow thou must ride forth again to Eltham with other papers.'

'If it must be, it must,' muttered Alured, shrugging his shoulders ; 'but I give thee fair warning that a woman much misliketh making love by proxy ; and blame not me if the issue run counter to thy hopes.'

'I never asked thee to make love to her by proxy, jackanapes. Just tell her what I am : make me out as valiant and doughty as thou canst, and say I can't sleep o' nights, and—all that, you know ; and say I am eager to go to church with her to bind on the betrothal-ring—and all that.'

'Aye, aye—and all that. John, you will kill me ! Well, I will do my devoir faithfully—there is his grace hammering on the table. I must begone. Think on the fair Sibyl (with the saffron hair) till I return.'

Alured went into presence to Archbishop Simon of Sudbury, while John Standish passed through the guard-room on his way to the Bishop's Walk. In the guard-room he found the page, Willie Langland, musing over the portraits and bright armour that hung upon the wall.

‘Well! young caitiff,’ said Standish, ‘what day-dream keeps thee from the sunshine yonder? To be frank with thee, thy cheek is all too pale, and these arms feel like strings of gossamer. Thou studiest overmuch.’

The page looked up into the sunburnt face of the strong squire, and perused with wide eyes the healthy brown skin and dimpled cheek and unfurrowed brow. Then he said sadly :

‘I have been wondering if I shall ever be strong enough to tilt or wield the double-handled sword.’

‘Not thou! Take no thought* for such ambition. Thou art made for a holy bishop. One day we shall see thy portrait on these walls. But come forth into the pleasaunce. Let us watch the barges shoot by on the river until Alured of Dene returns.’

‘How grim and frowning the great gate always appears to me,’ said the boy. ‘I always think, were I an archbishop, I would build me a pleasant palace, set about with gardens and fountains, instead of these gloomy fortresses—all massive with stone and iron-guarded gates.’

‘Then wouldst thou find thy palace reft from thee one fine day by some outlawed ribalds. No! I am for a strong castle.’

‘I would my sister Carlotta could see thee joust in the tourney.’

‘What! Thou seemest not to love Alured so much as of yore.’

‘No; for he teaseth me in the guard-room. He shall not wed my sister if I can prevent it.’

* Be not anxious.

‘But, an thy sister further his suit, ’tis no business of thine to let* it.’

‘I know not. I would my father were some valiant lord in a castle, and not a poor singing-clerk, for other men’s sons to flout and mock.’

‘Do the other pages, then, taunt thee with thy lack of high parage?’†

‘Even so do they. Poor father!—why did not God make him a lord?’

‘Now, my young clerk, I am going to give thee sound rede:‡ Be content with what God wills—for hear Robert Mannyng in his “Handlyng Synne:”

“Unworthily art thou made gentil,
If thou in words and deeds be ill.”

and again :

“The Lord that made of earthè Earls,
Of the same earthè made he churls.”’

‘Yea,’ answered Willie, ‘it is just what my own father would have said. That is why I love thee, John Standish; for thou always hast the fear of God before thine eyes.’

* Prevent.

† Parentage.

‡ Advice.

CHAPTER IV.

THE two squires dropped down the stream in a wherry, landing at the Temple stairs. From this point they walked along the Strand, past Whitefriars and Blackfriars, through Ludgate and St. Paul's Churchyard.

The streets were narrow, and the jutting upper stories almost met overhead in places, while the broken line of irregular gables, the swinging sign-boards over every door, and the ale-stakes (seven feet in length) gave variety to the prospect. At every instant they jostled against some 'religious' monk or friar, for the streets were full of them—the black Dominican friar and Benedictine monk, the white Cistercian monk and gray Franciscan friar, the Austin friar, and Carmelite. Then there were reeves running to Chepe for provisions for the convent; pardoners with wallet and vernicle (or portrait of Christ) sewed on their hood; pilgrims and palmers, with ampullæ or phials of holy water; franklins and yeomen from the country, on business bent; ladies daintily borne in chair or whirlecote; the parson of the town; the great merchants in silken hoods and gold chains; the comely apprentices (many of them

younger scions of noble houses); the craftsmen and the poor swinked* churl who laboured for a penny a day.

But Alured of Dene and John Standish pushed on through the mire and the crowd of lawyers at the north porch of Paul's, where a friar was preaching in the shrouds (or awning outside the wall); and as they drew near Cornhill they heard the big bell going in the 'Tun' of Cornhill, and soon they espied a blaze and saw in the crowd that surrounded the burning house the bedel of the ward trying to pull down the upper story with his long hook of iron. Before every house, as the law enacted, stood a tub of water, and from these the citizens were baling water to quench the flames. They waited a few minutes to see the house demolished, and as it was nearly all of wood, the bedel and his helpers were not long about it.

Just as they approached Langland's house a pig was seen abroad, and of course the 'prentices took advantage of the law to pursue and slay the truant—for no pig might roam the streets; but 'gentle dogs' might go free in the fourteenth century. The last obstacle which stayed their course was an unhappy baker who was being dragged along the street on a hurdle, with bare feet and hands tied, and with the fraudulent loaf tied ignominiously about his neck.

In the kitchen downstairs they found good Dame Langland puffing and panting over a mortrewe, which she was compounding with a pestle and mortar.

'Good-day to you, gentles; ye will find Long Will

* Hard-worked.

in the Solar;’* and she nodded to the two youths to climb the ladder.

They surprised Langland and Carlotta, both writing near the window; the former rose at their entrance and bade them welcome, but Carlotta continued her copying as though unconscious of the interruption.

‘Calote,’ said her father, ‘greet these worthy youths—thy friend, Master Alured de Dene?’

‘Is Master John Standish of Kent, esquire of honour to his Grace of Canterbury, and my very good friend.’

Carlotta had taken Alured’s proffered hand and curtseyed to his friend, scarce lifting her eyes to peruse his features. She was still standing by the little table, when her father, getting stools for his guests, said:

‘Now, Calote, my girl, get on with thy copy. Ye see, my masters, we have had a profitable order of three copies on vellum, one for Master William Walworth, the Mayor, one for Master John of Northampton, and a third for a certain young Richard Whittington.’

‘Thou art becoming quite in vogue, Dan Will,’ said Alured; and then dropping his voice to Standish, ‘Contrive a long look at her, while I engage the poet in feigned converse.’

‘Ah! it is not man’s good opinion I care for,’ said Langland, stroking back the long black hair from his brow, and turning upon Alured a face of great beauty

* Upper room.

of outline, but sad and worn as with melancholy thoughts.

‘Still, one must live,’ rejoined Alured; ‘and if the “Vision of Piers Ploughman” brings thee in a good purchase,* so much the better.’

Langland bent his dark, piercing eyes upon the speaker, and sighed:

‘Young man, thou art but on the threshold of life, and deemst the pleasures worth the buying—perhaps at the cost of a clear conscience—who knows but thy God? but we who have tasted the fruit and known its swift decay can assure such as thou, and thy friend there, that the only thing which maketh this life tolerable is the thought that by our having lived we have done something to further the will of God and to advance His kingdom on earth.’

‘Why, thou shouldst have been a priest!’ said Alured.

‘In sooth, I am in minor orders,’ Langland replied, removing his skull-cap and showing his tonsure; ‘but I never got priested somehow; and I ween that the pen may be as powerful to do good as the preacher.’

‘Yea, sickerly: one cannot go into any company now—be it in convent, or bower, or hall, or even in mead-house,† but they shall quote thy lines; and the very lollards and churls of the village are chaunting thy pithy sayings about do-well and do-bet.’

‘I have been no respecter of persons, Sir Squire. I have chastised alike the greedy abbot, the misproud earl, and the idle vagrant. I have sometimes looked

* Income.

† Ale-house.

when my lord of London should send his summoner and hale me to his court ; but hitherto have I suffered nothing.'

John Standish had been so interested in gazing upon a man about whom he had heard so much that he had taken no notice of Carlotta ; but she had furtively examined him. He now, however, rose and came near her, asking leave to note her manuscript.

After awhile she looked up timidly and said :

'Canst thou tell me aught of a little boy—a brother of mine—who is page in the good archbishop's household ? Is he well ?'

'Yea, mistress, I know the child perfectly, and he loves me specially. He is not made for shrewd blows, though, poor lad, and . . .'

'Tell me sooth ! doth he languish ? Hath he the fever-sickness ?'

'Not so. Rest easy about the boy. We left him merry, but he waxeth over fast and looketh weak. I would he were stronger.'

Carlotta pierced Standish by the glance of her great, dark eyes. Had not his simple heart been full of love for another the bolt must have got home. At length they rose to leave, having accepted Dame Langland's invitation to come on St. John's Eve and see the mummers.*

Alured had scarcely exchanged a dozen words with Carlotta, but their eyes had spoken, and the squire's fair, smiling face had lent a charm for the rest of the day to the dreary occupation in which she was engaged.

* Players in masks.

‘A goodly youth, that other,’ said her father, resuming his pen.

‘Wottest thou so, father? Kind-hearted I think he is, for he spake full tenderly of our Willie, but goodly I may not call him.’

‘Because thou art a woman, Calote, never going to the heart of a young man, but captured by a fair outside and glosing* terms.’

‘Thou art hard on my sex to-day. Perchance thy pen is ill-fettled,† my father?’ and her eyes had a mischievous light in them.

‘If I be peevish, daughter, pass it over with a prayer for my bettering; but do thou mind thy manuscript more, and these licorous, young gallants less.’

For a time there was no sound in the little chamber but the squeaking of pens, but when at length Langland had finished writing these lines on Holy Church,

‘Then I courbed‡ on my knees, and cried her of grace,
And prayed her piteously pray for my sins,’

he chanced to look up, and saw the big tears coursing down Carlotta’s cheeks. Then was he wonder-sad at the words he had said to her, and his kind heart smote him that he had been all too ungentle with this, his patient child, who had never yet plained, howsoever severe the task he had put upon her.

‘Child,’ he said in a low, deep note that seemed to float softly about the walls of the chamber as though it were a cry of remorse seeking an outlet to

* Flattering.

† Prepared, set up.

‡ Bent.

Heaven—'child, I wist not that my tongue could be so shrewish. Come and kiss me and say, "Father, I forgive thee, for that thou art forwearied and forspent." '*

Carlotta instantly rose and flung herself on her knees by her father's side, and burying her face in his bosom, sobbed aloud.

'Hush! sweet maid—let not thy mother hear, else will she take thee from me for sewing of kirtels. Out and alas! I have put too much upon thee of late; but be of good cheer, for I shall take thee with me to a great feast to which I am bidden of the great poet, Master Chaucer, an it like thee.'†

Carlotta looked up, and the sunlight of gratitude was shining through the tears of sorrow.

'Yea, Calote; he hath bidden me bring thee with me.'

'Me, father, and by name?'

'Sooth; now dost thou wax red as any rose! It seems he saw thee last Sunday at Paul's, questioned who thou wert, and when he knew thou wert my daughter, he came into the vestiary and spake words of muckle courtesy, and craved of me that I would bring thee to the Savoy.'

'To the Palace of the Savoy, father?' said Carlotta, in a tone of delight.

'Yea, by my fay. For Prince John of Gaunt hath left him in full charge of his palace, so that he doth divers times quit his lodging over Aldgate, and repair to the riverside; in special, when he is minded to offer any largesse of wine, banquet, and song.'

* Tired out.

† If it please thee.

‘ Shall I have to sing, father?’ said Carlotta timidly.

‘ We go as honoured guests, my sweet, not as hired song-smiths. If Master Geoffrey ask thee to carol, thou wilt not surely grudge him a song.’

‘ No, certes. For he is, from all I can hear, a merry, pleasant gentleman.’

So it was Will Langland comforted himself and his daughter. And Carlotta overheard her father humming to himself some lines out of the ‘ Handlyng Synne,’ of Robert Manning of Bourne :

‘ Ne no thing is to man so dear
As woman’s love in good mannère ;
A good womàn is mannes blisse,
When their love right and steadfast is.’

She could not help smiling to herself at the furtive penance to which the good man was putting himself for her sake. Her bosom swelled with love for a father so tender ; but she could not let him go on bruising himself without showing, by a touch of ironical humour, that her own wound was now quite healed. So she gently warbled as a refrain to his murmured notes :

‘ Love thou thy childer out of wit ;
Then trust to them and helpless sit.’

To which he made no other reply than by once raising his eyes from his manuscript, and giving a little humorous nod.

So close and familiar was the intercourse between father and daughter, their minds were so nicely attuned together that a glance or a gesture was enough to convey a message of love, or set right a

misunderstanding. And when Dame Langland shortly after entered, sniffing the breeze for a bone of contention, a look of humorous intelligence exchanged between them said as plainly as words could say it, 'Here cometh mother—with a whiff of earth, earthy. But she is a good soul; let us not seem to take umbrage at her too great business.'

'How now! What trote-vale* have ye twain been havering† all the morn?'

'Writing, good house-wife, writing; with here and there a glosing‡ of pleasant speech to honey the task; for thou kenst the old saw:

'“Serve God gladly with lovely cheer,
Then is thy service to him most dear.”'

'Well-a-day! “Serve God,” quotha? Serve Will Langland! serve proud conceit and high-mindedness! serve the gaoler at Newgate, who shall have thee in safe keeping for writing treason! I marvel thou canst be so simple, William Langland, to sit with thy daughter a writing such fustian verse, when thy worsers are up and about, earning nobles§ where thou shalt reap but a poor half-groat.|| I marvel at it.'

'Yea, Kit; it is true that my labour is not for this generation, else shouldst thou be sitting in a rich brocade of samite. But, dear heart, set not thy affection on things of earth, pride and wealth, and semblable¶ toys of vanity; nor allow** not them that seek only to be great:

◦ Idle talk.

‡ Commentary.

|| Groat, 4d.

† Chattering.

§ Noble, 6s. 8d.

¶ Similar.

°° Praise.

“ All is good that they may get,
They ween to live for evermore ;
But when high God at dome is set,
Such treasure is a feeble store.”

‘ That soundeth mighty well in church, Will ; but
let me tell thee, now Lottie hath gone to the bower,
that thou art a spilling* thy child’s fortune.’

‘ How so, wife ?’

‘ Her face, smutterlich though it be, might attract
a bachelor of price ; but thou art marring her only
fortune by this unresting pen-work.’

Langland said nothing, but resolved to let his
daughter have a larger liberty to see the sun ; not
for the sake of a good marriage, but because he felt
he had put too much upon her, willing and patient as
she ever was.

* Spoil.

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning Alured pranked himself in his newest get*—a courtepy, or short coat of green silk, very short and tight, purple leggings, also of silk, and shoes of outrageous length, the toes of which had to be held up by silver chains to the cincture that girt his leg above the knee. As he minced into the Archbishop's study, that prelate said, without looking round from the parchment on which he was writing:

'Is that thou, Alured of Dene?'

'Yea, Father, at thy service.'

'One moment more. There, 'tis done—the wax—and the cord—good! Take these anon to Eltham Palace, and if thou—saints! what gear is this? Sirrah, what meaneth all this fool's gear?'

On turning to address his esquire, the Archbishop's eye had fallen on poor Alured's gaudy dress.

'Methought, holy Father, that my errand warranted the superfluity.'

'Thy errand, forsooth! Thou naughty knave! this is thy extravagant lust for admiration which is luring thee to thy destruction. And what a sermon art thou about to preach to the godless, who haply shall say: "Lo, here cometh one of the Archbishop's

* Fashion.

household. Ye may know these by the wealth upon their backs. Money, that should be given to the poor, is squandered on the livery of his servants by this misproud Prelate and Chancellor." What, thou sinful varlet! is it nothing to thee that thy extravagance shall drag thee to hell, and make thy master's name a by-word among the ribalds for ostentation? Lo! these are the men who serve me; youths whom I have fostered and taught and clothed and fed from childhood. Art not shamed?'

Alured could only look down humbly at his soaring toes.

'Well, sirrah, hast no tongue? Go direct to thy chamber and doff all those gauds of Satan, and do me on thy plainest and thy meanest attire. Go!'

Thus Alured, much abashed, disappointed and humiliated, went forth to do the Prelate's bidding; while Simon of Sudbury paced to and fro for some minutes in great ire.

The Archbishop was rather tall and thin; his hair, which had been brown in his youth, was now iron-gray; his eyes were gray, and his mouth thin-lipped—a choleric, irritable man; one whose nerves were easily upset, and who brusquely said on the spur of the moment what he would upon reflection have been glad to recall. But with much outside show of asperity and roughness there were few men living who had kinder hearts. Certainly none so kind-hearted ever made so many enemies by ill-advised utterances—though learned in the law, he yet had not the tact of the lawyer. Perhaps he was the most unpopular minister of his time, and yet no other was half as

conscientious in the discharge of his office, and in seeking the good of his fellow-men. He had lived long in France, and his ways, his tastes, his language, were all French. Now, French tastes were utterly abhorrent to a nation which had just come through the wars of Edward the Third with some addition of glory and considerable loss of wealth, and the comforts which wealth provides.

With his own household, Archbishop Simon was on very good terms—for anyone who lived in close intimacy with him soon found out his sterling qualities, and learned to make allowances for his foibles.

The man who lived with him and did not love him must have been either a fool or a scoundrel.

Very shortly Alured reappeared, demure and chastened, in a sad suit of sober gray, only relieved by the episcopal badge of red.

‘That will do, my son,’ said Simon, smiling, as if to make amends for his former vehemence of objurgation. ‘Ride off now as fast as thou canst.’

In the courtyard Alured met the page Willie Langland, who cried:

‘Hallo! where be all thy bravery in which I saw thee pranked but now? Thou lookest like a dead fish from which all the lustre has gone.’

Alured smiled grimly, and repressed the desire to wring the offender’s neck by thinking on Carlotta.

The King was amusing himself at Eltham by fishing in the moat. All the ladies of the Court were on the bank, some reclining, others strolling to and fro, and all feigning to be deeply interested in the sport. Their horned head-dresses, some of them projecting

two feet above their foreheads, must have been cumbrous wear on this sultry day, but pride had, even then, learned to ignore pain.

‘Crying colours,’ that is to say, loud and flashy hues, were the order of the day; nor did they appear out of taste in the open air, for Dame Nature is cunning to tone down all such extravagances by wondrous shades of green and gray. Richard the Second was the most extravagant dresser of his day. Yet was he very precise in keeping his subjects within the limits of the sumptuary law: the yeoman should pay no more than forty pence for his cloth, should wear no jewels, only a knife harnessed; his wife should wear no fur, except it were of fox, lamb, or cat; the farm-servant should wear russet of twelve-pence, or forfeit his apparel. In like manner every grade had its own legal limits of luxury, and Richard took credit to himself for seeing the law maintained. But, being fond of gay attire, he resented meanness in those about him. Consequently, when the unlucky Alured appeared on the sward, attended by the marshal, the young King looked him over from head to foot very superciliously before breaking the seal.

‘Art thou the Archbishop’s coystril?’* asked Sir John Holland, the King’s half-brother, with an insolent laugh.

‘That is as it shall please his Grace,’ said Alured, colouring with wrath.

‘Ha, ha!’ laughed Richard, ‘the varlet had thee on the hip there, John.’

‘Perhaps he was sent out in silk, and hath ex-

* Groom.

changed his brave attire with the Flemings for a consideration. Eh, fellow ?’

‘That is just as your Highness likes,’ replied Alured with an affectation of humility, but tinged with such fierce sarcasm that Sir John grew furious.

‘We must save the poor squire, or he will draw upon him,’ whispered the Princess of Wales. Then aloud to her son : ‘May we ladies ask the young esquire some questions while thou art reading the despatches, my Lord ?’

‘Certes,’ said Richard, ‘but pray do not go too near his boots.’

Whereat all the courtiers laughed aloud, of course, and Alured with a flush of shame broke forth :

‘My master commanded me to wear this attire, else had I dressed in a manner more convenient to my station.’

‘It is not like his French courtesy,’ said the King, and walked away.

Alured saw that he had done himself no good by this explanation, and had damaged his master in the King’s eyes. He now begged the Princess to hear his excuses, and to expound to the King at another season the reason of his mean garb.

The ladies were vastly amused at the naïve confession and the quaint penance, and fully sympathised with him in his sore distress. And ever as Alured went on with his narration he kept stealing glances first at one of the court beauties and then at another, for he was vain enough to wish to make a conquest in spite of his mean attire. But, though bright eyes flashed dangerously on all sides, he gave

a little sigh—a faithful sigh—as he thought on the sweet face and majestic pose of poor Carlotta, far more fitted to be a Princess, as he thought, than all these daughters of the great and noble.

Meanwhile Richard was pacing to and fro upon the bank of the moat with his half-brother, Sir John Holland, and both were discussing the Archbishop's letters.

Richard, but fifteen years old, was naturally inclined to lean for advice upon his elders; and just now the mocking, dark face of Sir John was close to the young King's, as they studied together the purport of the document; and Alured could not help seeing that the boy-king's face, usually waxen and red, was now pale with anger, that he pushed his slender fingers vehemently through his auburn locks, and that the large, sleepy blue eyes had lost their look of watery vagueness, and were lit by a fire of petulant temper.

'Yea, John,' Alured heard him say in his shrill, girlish voice, 'the Chancellor, as thou sayst, dares to treat me like one of his own pages, and would chastise me for extravagance of luxury, forsooth! Lo, you! mark how he would caution me to walk warily in these slippery times, when the villein and the craftsman is moody and discontented, and the country weary and impoverished with foreign wars—he might have added, and papal exactions; for he told me himself the other day that the Holy Father's collector sent over to Rome each year twenty thousand marks gotten from English gipsires*—and

* Pockets.

then he would restrict our royal expenses; by St. Edward! that is too much, John! £20,000 for our castles; soldiers, £10,000; the Court, £15,000; our stables, £5,000; our progresses, £5,000; almsgiving, £10,000—well! I don't see how we can make it less. If my grandfather needed so much, then we have a right to claim a similar contribution from Parliament.'

'Quite so, my royal brother, make him an answer to that end; and whilst thou, my lord, art dictating to the clerk, I will amuse myself with the Archbishop's esquire, who is making far too free yonder with the ladies of thy Court.'

So Richard, the King, repaired to the palace, sulkily, to attend to this annoying business, which let him from his fishing; and Sir John Holland called to the Princess, his mother, to come and admire a fat, lazy trout, which was lying under the bank. As the ladies pressed round silently, Sir John Holland said:

'Come, Master Esquire, exhibit thy prowess in tickling this fish; if thou canst lure it forth with thy fingers, thou shalt kiss the prettiest of my mother's maidens.'

The guerdon* amused rather than shocked the young ladies, for they gently laughed and cast side-long glances of encouragement at the handsome young squire.

Alured, feeling his pride as a fisherman at stake, lay down upon his face, and was reaching his arm

* Reward.

down stealthily and slowly towards the drowsy trout, when Sir John seized him by the heels and flung him head-first into the moat, with a tremendous splash.

There was a universal cry from the ladies, and clasped hands and open mouths expressed the feeling of anxiety with which they witnessed the long legs disappearing deep beneath the shining surface ; but when, like a water-hound, Alured reappeared, striking vigorously for the bank, their fears turned to mirth, and a merry peal of laughter broke forth ; but not from all, for Sibyl de Feschamp went up to Sir John and taunted him with taking an unknightly advantage ; and as she spake, her pretty face wore so fierce a look of scorn that he lifted his hand as if to strike. Sibyl fled from him, but he pursued, and, catching her round the waist, flung her, in all her splendid apparel, into the moat.

Alured had but just reached the top of the bank, dripping and discomfited, when the screams of Sibyl and the others, and then the splash, aroused him to activity. In a moment he rushed to the spot where Sir John was standing laughing like a glutton at his merry jest, and, striking the coward on the chest, he bore him backwards into the water. Alured then dived for Sibyl, and, bearing her up with his left hand, swam back with her to the bank.

‘Out and alas!’ ‘Out, harrow and wayleway!’ ‘Sonties!’ and ‘Benedicite!’ Such were some of the cries that saluted the ears of Sibyl and Alured as they scrambled, like half-drowned rats, up the slippery bank ; for many of the servants, knaves, and maids

had come running forth from the palace on hearing the screams.

Sir John Holland had not fared so well, for, as he had gone into the water backwards, he had swallowed a goodly mouthful of weeds and water, and was choking and spluttering in most ignoble fashion, as he vainly tried to get a firm footing in the slimy mud which covered the bottom of the moat.

‘Lend the lord a hand—a rope for Sir John!’ cried Alberic de Vere, Earl of Oxford, running up to the marge of the mere.

‘A rope for Sir John!’ cried all the knaves and coystrials.

‘A rope’s end would serve the turn better,’ said Alured, shaking the sparkling drops from his long hair.

The audacity of the remark made all turn their eyes upon the speaker.

Meanwhile the boy-King had come, running, to the scene of the struggle, and when the matter was explained to him he joined heartily in the mirth, and said it was fairly done, and Sir John had gotten only his deserts. Sibyl had leaned heavily on Alured’s arm as he drew her forth, and as he gazed upon her pale face and closed eyes, she opened them wide and shot him to the heart with such a tender look of gratitude that he was only too well pleased to have spoiled a doublet for the nonce.* But Mary de Molyneux, whose eye, like a falcon’s on the wing, had been fixed upon them both, remarked to the Princess Joan :

‘I protest, Sibyl’s comedy will now grow to a

* The one occasion.

tragedy : for she bade me mark this morn how she would allure the young fool to fall in love with her ; but now he, by saving of her life, hath gone far to tangle the silly wench in the meshes which she was preparing for the squire.'

'Yea, Mary, I marked how she clung to him and swooned upon his bosom. But we must see to the upshot of this, for Sir John will be seeking his revenge, an he be not checked in time. 'Twere a goodly amusement to call the youth to my bower, when he hath had change of serk* and doublet, and thou and I shall listen to their prattle.'

So it was that Alured presently found himself brought by command of the Princess to the royal bower, or sitting-room, where he was left alone for a short time.

The squire had been arrayed in new clothes of elegant fashion, short tunic and tight-fitting leggings and long pointed shoes ; he glanced first with some complacency at his costume, then round at the little wainscoted chamber, its tapestried doors, cupboards of oak, and quaintly-carved settles and table. Presently there was a rustle of silk, and Sibyl appeared, all smiles and blushes and confusion—a pretty sight for a man to behold, especially for one who had just saved so winsome† a creature. She held out her hand, and he stooped and kissed it : she did not withdraw it, but they stood facing one another, hand in hand, each smiling dangerously into the other's blue eyes. What should come of such folly ?

That was the question which Alured put sharply

* Shirt.

† Winning.

to himself, for he was not lost to a sense of honour : he remembered John Standish, and his request ; he remembered Carlotta and her love and beauty.

‘ Well, thou foolish boy !’ murmured Sibyl, with one of her bewitching looks ; ‘ canst not say thou art wonder-glad to see me safe and well ?’

‘ I was spell-bound, Lady Sibyl, by thy gracious presence. Never have I seen thee look so comely, so fascinating—it makes me all too sad and sorry.’

‘ Now the blissful Maid preserve thee ! for thou speakest riddles in my ear. Why shouldest thou be sorry to find me—to find me comely, as thou sayst it ? In sooth, an thou look’st at me so, I shall blush for shame.’

‘ Ah !’ The utter abandonment of his sigh was so expressive that Sibyl laughed a merry laugh, and there was a rustle and the ghost of a titter behind the arras.*

‘ Thou canst not know the depth of my emotion, Sibyl,’ murmured Alured.

‘ No ?’ replied the girl, with a pretty affectation of indifference.

‘ But I must do my devoir† without let or hindrance ;’ he paused, and Sibyl thought this was a strange way of protesting his love and faith. ‘ Canst thou love one who dotes on thee, Sibyl ? one who, perchance, all unknown to thee, hath been nursing a fire within his bosom which he could not quench, and dare not communicate ?’

Sibyl blushed, and gently pressed the hand which was holding her own.

* Curtain or tapestry.

† Duty.

‘Canst thou give me some assurance that the faint heart may yet win the fair lady? Canst thou give me for such a one some gage d’amour?’*

Sibyl unwound a crimson scarf from about her throat, which just now seemed to be blushing in sympathy with her cheeks, and laid it softly upon Alured’s arm; then she faltered forth in trembling accents:

‘I, too, must confess my little sin: this morn—yea, this very morn—I loved thee not, Alured; but out of vanity was all for alluring thee by such wiles as we women possess. But thou hast risked thy life for mine, and now . . .’

‘For Heaven’s sake, forbear to utter it!’ cried Alured in sore distress.

‘Nay, but I will! I owe it to thy chivalry, to thy generous devotion, to say . . .’

‘Hush, Sibyl; speak no more! What I have done for thee is nothing.’

‘Yet hath it gone near to win my very heart, if it be not unmaidenly to say so;’ Sibyl’s head drooped lower and lower, until it rested on Alured’s breast.

‘Alas! alas!’ he murmured, and the perspiration broke from his brow.

She raised her head, and, looking into his eyes, asked why he cried ‘alas!’

‘It is all a grievous error, Lady Sibyl—a misunderstanding, a . . .’

She put out her dainty hand against his bosom, and said, with a sob in her voice:

‘What error? What misunderstanding?’

‘It was not for myself I was pleading just now.’

‘For whom, then?’ she fiercely cried.

* Love-token.

‘For Master John Standish, esquire to his Grace the Arch . . .’

A smothered peal of laughter from an adjoining closet cut short the sentence. Sibyl snatched the scarf away and tried to bear out the repulse in scorn and indignant chiding, shouting:

‘Go to, for a fool and a simpleton!’ but anon, like a forweaned* child that hath been denied her choicest wish, she sank into a settle, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into a torrent of tears and uncontrollable sobs.

But Alured could not bear to see the maiden’s grief; an impulse which he could not withstand made him kneel before her, and cover the half-resisting hands with kisses. At this moment the Princess, with Mary de Molyneux, entered the bower.

‘A goodly sight, I trow! Arise, Master Squire, and do not devour the flesh of my maiden in that gluttonous manner. Rise, Sibyl, and go to thy bower, and wash thy silly face. We shall put the knotty question before our Court of Love: “Ought such as thou to woo for thyself, when thou findest thou art beloved, or doth honour engage thee to woo still for thy friend?” But, as the wench is gone, tell me anon; is there another maiden in the case?’

Alured stammered, and said he believed there was.

The Princess laughed at him for a fool that knew not his own mind.

‘Yet,’ she remarked, as she motioned to him to quit the chamber, ‘an thou lovest another, and that other love thee, then is the question still more complicated and vexed. But the King calls for thee. Begone!’

* Spoilt.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Alured rode into the great court-yard at Lambeth with his men-at-arms attendant, all the pages looked forth from the narrow lancet-windows to see the cause of the clatter.

The boy, Willie Langland, was just then lying at full length, face downward, in the narrow embrasure of one of the windows. The thickness of the walls was just the length of his body, and the width of the aperture just admitted of his lying comfortably with his head resting on his hands and elbows. An open book lay before him—the war-songs of Laurence Minot ; but the dark, liquid eyes of the dreaming boy were not bent on the page which told of Crécy or Neville's Cross ; for the contrast between the singer's stirring strains and his own feeble pulse and fluttering heart had set the poor child a-thinking, and then a-sighing, and from sighing he fell a-praying ; and so the tears had come into the brown, wistful eyes, for he was pitying himself very much just then because he was not so strong as other boys were, and, he thought to himself, ' My Father in heaven loves me not for certain, else would He list to my fervent prayer for the strength of a Cœur de Lion, or the prowess of a Black Prince. But here, alas ! I lie

faint and weary, waning with the sickness from day to day.' However, when Alured rode in with the king's cognizance of the white hart lying chained, and the motto 'Nemo me tangat' embroidered on his breast, he could not resist running with the other pages to hear what this should mean. Had Alured become one of the King's men? To all questions, however, the squire deigned to return no answer. But it was very speedily brought to the ears of the Archbishop that his squire had put off the episcopal livery and assumed that of the King, and Alured was summoned into the solarium* before he could change his clothes, as he had intended to do.

Of course, then the whole story had to come out before his Grace, who listened with many nervous twitchings of feature, but dismissed him with a smile, and the remark that 'it was fortunate for him he had not been wearing his fantastical shoes, or they might have entangled him in the weeds of Eltham Moat.'

When John Standish was able to get a few words quietly with his friend, he asked him if he had been able to introduce his suit to the Lady Sibyl. Now, Alured had been thinking on this all the way home, and moral cowardice had gained the day. He had made up his mind that it would give Standish much needless trouble if he told him the real facts, and he had resolved to commit a small sin to do what he considered a generous act of friendship. Hence he replied in an off-hand way:

'How canst thou think I had the means of approaching thy feret† when I had hardly delivered my

* Upper or private room.

† Love.

letters but that craven thrust me into the water? Was I to address myself to her when the mud and the weeds were rendering me most like an old witch taken off the ducking-stool? Besides, the lady herself was presently dripping and all-to soused.'

'Soothly, I forgot it; but an thou canst find a winning way, Alured, do for our friendship say a good word in my favour.'

'Humph! I tell thee nay! It is not the best way to go about such nice* matters. I'll ha' none of it!'

'What! by St. Dunstan, but thou didst promise to do it for me! Why lookst so ferly† and waxest red? Thou hast had speech with her!'

'Yea—a word or two; I like her not, John. Take my counsel, and free thyself from her. She is a misproud quean, and over-digne.‡'

'That's it, my lad. It is the pride of her, and the outrecuidance,§ and the high-mindedness which draw me unto her. Oh! Alured, if only I had thy happy address with women! But I shall never dare to tell my love.'

Alured laughed.

'Thou art an old fool, and passing ignorant of the ways of women, John. But I tell thee once more, render her up to others, for she is not for thee.'

Standish glanced with momentary suspicion at his friend's face.

'Thou art not thyself touched by her marvellous beauty?'

'What! I! Benedicite! If ever there was a minx

* Delicate.

† Strange.

‡ Disdainful.

§ Arrogance.

needed chastising for a shrewd tongue and a superfluity of naughtiness, commend me to Lady Sibyl! But I crave thy pardon, John. The sober, honest, conscientious John Standish hath chosen for his love the frivolous, unbuxome,* wayward maid of honour! There is an old proverb which my grandfather used to quote to me, "He wise is that ware is," and so I bid thee mind my wholesome rede.'†

'We have indeed changed parts,' reflected Standish to himself, on being left alone. 'I, who am wont to play the Mentor and chastise poor Alured's weak conduct, now suffer myself to fall—perhaps justly—under his lash. Yet what can a man do when he falls in love? I should die if I had to give her up!'

Then Standish rose and gat him to horse, for he had a mission from his master which would carry him some miles away. He did not look like dying just yet, for his frame was stout and strong, his cheek was brown and his eye full of fire: a knight every inch, trained in the manège of his steed and in all feats of sword-play and tourney, he was fain to exchange these manly qualities for Alured's more showy accomplishments, his glosing‡ tongue and waxen complexion and elegant manner. Surely love maketh of man a muckle fool!

It happed one day, not long after this, that Carlotta and a girl-friend sauntered forth of the City gates to take the fresh breezes of Highgate. After putting some coins into the bag which the poor prisoners in Newgate gaol had let down from the

* Unbending, disobedient.

† Advice.

‡ Flattering.

window, they mounted the steep hill of Holborn, where the good monks of Ely Priory had their crocus-garden, some forty acres in extent, for the making of 'monks' saffron,' that specific cure for low spirits.

'Thou, Alice, at all events, dost not need the remedy,' said Carlotta to her mirthful friend, a daughter of Sir James Fitz-Warren, of the City.

'No, that I do not, Carlotta; I thank Heaven all my sky is blue as yet.'

'I saw thee at Master Chaucer's entertainment at the Savoy, Alice. I saw a certain City apprentice make his tender approaches to thee—a goodly youth, with a fine, quick eye, and noble port. Pray, who may he be?'

'One Richard Whittington, dearest, of the West Country—an uplandish young man; but my father says that already he hath some repute among the great merchants, for all that he be only twenty-three years of age.'

'Didst ask him his age?' said Carlotta quietly.

Alice replied by a playful tap on her friend's hand.

'To tell thee sooth, Carlotta, when I asked thee to come abroad with me this afternoon I half hoped to meet this young merchant; for he oftentimes rides out towards Highgate when the day's work is done.'

'Indeed! But thy father, I trow, seeth no let or impediment to thy meeting this gallant?'

'Look not so sober and demure, Lottie; be sure I dare not go counter to my father's will, even if I would.'

'Tis well. As thy degree is higher than mine, so should thy prudence be the greater.'

'Talking about degrees reminds me of what I

marked at the Savoy the other day. I saw thee, Lottie, when Master Chaucer fetched thee and thy father from anear the salt to sit at the high table. I marked—and all the company marked—what singular honour he paid ye both. But what said he?’

‘Oh! Master Chaucer must needs imitate the Italian poets now, Alice, and . . . In sooth! he said many vain words I should do wrong to repeat.’

‘I heard him say there was never a face so lovely as thine in all Italy.’

‘Didst thou?’ Carlotta’s cheek flushed with pleasure; not that she cared for being called beautiful, but because the poor girl had lost her heart to a certain squire whom we know, and argued that if Chaucer thought her beautiful, Alured might think so too. ‘He asked me, Alice, if I were delicate with my needle; and when I told him, “Nay, for I am ever engaged with the pen,” he laughed, and said he should beg me of my father, for that he had it in mind to compose a long poem, the which he would have fairly copied out.’

‘What else did he say to thee?’

‘Only some holiday terms culled from the poets, the which I marked not. And when he perceived that all his praise of vain outside show moved me not either to blushes or laughter, he murmured half to himself:

“None counterfeited terms had she
To seemè wise, but after her degree
She spake, and all her wordès more or less
Sounyng in virtue and in gentillesse.”

And when Master Gower of Otford, in Kent, craved

to be made known to me, merry Master Chaucer said it was no manner of good that an old bachelor like him should seek to know a maid so shamefast in maiden shamefastness, "constant in heart and ever in businesse." But, indeed, Master Gower is the mirror of all courtesy, and speaketh ever fair to young maids.'

'It was a marvellous great triumph for thee and thy father, Lottie. His singing and thine were the finest part of the afternoon. An thou hadst heard my father extol thee for thy modest port and bearing, thine ear would have burned, I can promise thee.'

They had long since crossed the river Fleet by a foot-bridge, nor stopped to watch the sailing-boats as they carried their freights to Battle Bridge.* They were ascending the hill towards Highgate, walking through pleasant meads embowered in trees and vocal with the song of many birds, when suddenly a cry of alarm startled them.

From the brake hard by and from under the hawthorn bushes struggled a young girl in the grasp of an elderly man, and as she tried to free herself she cried on her mother.

Alice and Carlotta fled at the first sight of the horrible man, whose face was fire-red and blotched with pimples. But presently Carlotta cried:

'I cannot leave that child alone with the caitiff! I must return, Alice.'

So Carlotta turned and encountered the man.

'How darest thou so abuse thy power, evil man?' she cried, lifting up her head haughtily in very queenly guise.

* Now called King's Cross.

‘Hola!’ quoth the other; ‘go thy ways, and leave me to manage my own affairs, or I shall summon thee before the Archdeacon.’

‘So thou art a summoner? For very shame let the maid be.’

‘Her mother hath paid no tithe of eggs, nor yet of bacon, and when I call yonder at the cot this girl avoids me like sin.’

‘She doth well to avoid a foul sinner.’

‘Lo you now, mistress! thou hast spoken ill of dignities, and deservest the curse; yet, as ‘purse is the Archdeacon’s hell,’* I shall take the liberty of extracting from thy aulmonière† a half-groat to cover thy shrewdness of tongue.’

‘Thou shalt win never a doit from me, bad man.’

‘A half-groat, mistress, and a modest embrace, as I am cleped‡ Simon;’ and he strode towards Carlotta.

But she drew a shining dagger from her bosom, and stood like a lioness at bay, fronting the man. Alice and the peasant girl stood at a distance, screaming and wringing their hands.

‘Come, put up that knife, my pretty one, or I shall disarm thee roughly; for, much as I like garlick, leeks, and onions, yet I love the taste of a pretty maiden’s lips far better. Come, put it up.’

‘I shall put it in thy heart if thou stir a step nearer!’

‘Trow? then let us try conclusions: it may not be so hard as speaking Latin. Ha! thou she-cat, viper, nettle! thou hast cut my arm! Ha!’

* A fine is his mode of punishing.

† Long purse.

‡ Called.

Carlotta had struck home. The blow, parried by cloak and arm, had yet drawn blood. The black brows were bent, the blood flew to the envenomed face; the summoner had seized Carlotta by the wrist, and was bearing her down; she was already on one knee, with a cry of agony in her mouth, when a thundering tread sounded through the bushes, and in a moment the summoner was lifted bodily from the ground and flung heavily into the thorns.

‘What! my little Carlotta! My child, what makest* thou here?’

The speaker was a giant of at least seven feet in height, a monk, and he wore the cognizance of the Convent of St. Peter, Westminster.

Carlotta leaned upon her hand and wept.

The monk beckoned to Alice:

‘If this be thy friend, come and support her while I question with this licorous ruffian. Get up, thou varlet—is thy back broke?’

‘Yea, verily! I cannot move; but the Archdeacon shall hear of it. Thou shalt rue this piece of work! thou art as good as cursed!’

‘Pooh! fellow; a fig for thy curses! Kenst me not?’

‘Thou art John of Canterbury, as I well know.’

‘Aye, boy; and a Westminster monk—what reck† we of Westminster, thy Archdeacon, or thy Bishop of London? we own no lordship.’

‘I know it full well,’ groaned the summoner.

‘Get thee up and away, or I shall hurl thee over Paul’s!’

* Doest.

† Care.

The threat—jest though it was—worked a cure in the back: the fellow limped away, darting, however, a malicious scowl behind him.

Then Carlotta recovered herself, and made known the monk to Alice: ‘One of my father’s dearest friends,’ she added; ‘and the darling of all London town, for his size, his good-nature, merry humour, and courage.’

‘Softly! softly! my daughter; thou wilt make my heart beat a hole in this new monk’s habit. Come, let us sit and talk, for thou art shaken.’

They reclined on the grass, and John of Canterbury tried to put away the remembrance of their fright by narrating, in his quaint, humorous way, merry stories, or by mimicking certain queer characters, whom they all knew; for John was a consummate mimic.

As thus they sat or reclined a young man came by leading a horse by the bridle, the jangling bells of which announced his approach.

Alice was looking down very demurely when he doffed cap and said:

‘Good den* to ye—a beautiful view hence, is it not?’

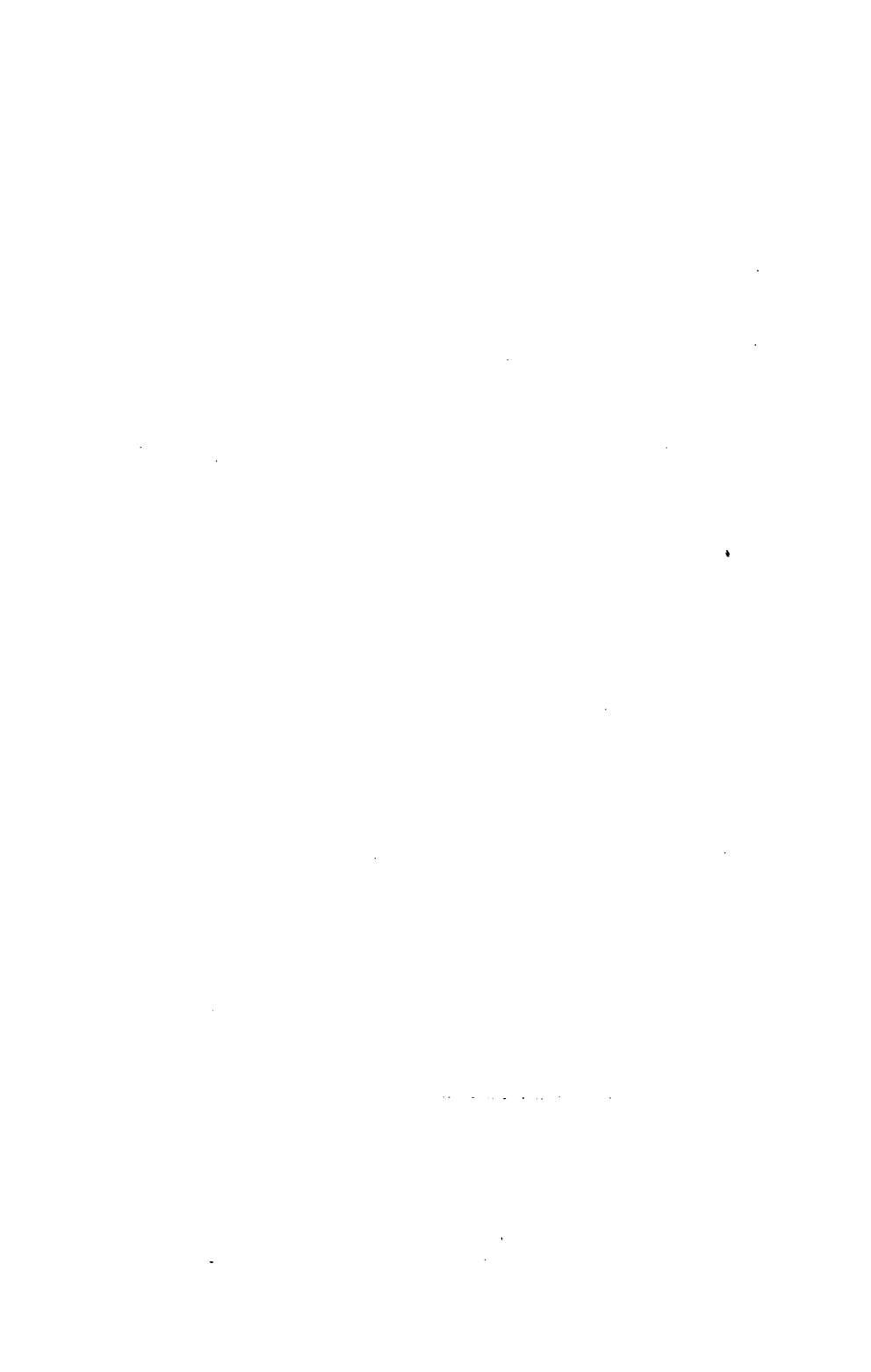
‘Ah! Master Richard Whittington,’ said the monk, ‘I left thee in a brown study on the hill yonder; but an thou hadst been here a whit sooner, thou mightst ha’ broken a knave’s scull, and rescued a fair young maid.’

Whittington begged to have the matter explained, heard the account with flashing eyes, and would

* Even.



DAN JOHN RESCUES CARLOTTA.



have ridden after the summoner; but the good-humoured giant restrained him, and Carlotta (not without a malicious sidelong glance at Alice) asked of him :

‘Prythee, good Master Whittington, what deep question in philosophy wast thou pondering up yonder? Nothing in Athelard or Anselm, I wis.’

‘Damoiselle, I cry you mercy! It was nought so deep nor so world-wide, only a poor reflection proper* to myself; for as I rode in the stillness of the evening, methought the merry sound of Bow bells came to my listening ears.’

‘And did that stir thoughts uncommon?’ asked Alice timidly.

‘Yea, by my fey! it well-nigh brought a tear into mine eyne,† Mistress Alice; for here one day, soon after I left my country home, I strolled to weep and vex my soul with home-sick longings, when so sweet a carillon came floating upward over the water-meadows below as seemed to sing merrily to me: “Turn again, Whittington, thrice Mayor of London town,” and from that moment I plucked up heart of grace, and resolved to bear me like a man.’

‘And was there no other thought for the future in thy musings?’ said Carlotta.

‘That I shall entrust to none but Mistress Alice,’ he replied, laughing; ‘do ye two, monk and nun, go on in front, so please you.’

In this order they returned to the City.

* Peculiar.

† Eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

It was the eve of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, the 23rd of June, and Dame Langland, like her neighbours in Cornhill, had prepared her solar, or upper room, for the entertainment of her guests who were coming to see the ridings, the pageants, the carols, and the games of that merry time.

But the one large window with its deep embrasure could not contain more than three or four spectators, and therefore Will Langland had caused to be erected by the side of the house a small scaffold with stools set upon it, whence those who did not fear the night air might see all in comfort. His dame was in the kitchen, stirring some savoury mess in a large iron pot over the fire of logs. Langland had just descended the ladder which rested on the kitchen floor, and was the only means of reaching bower and solar. Dame Langland sniffed a little tartly.

‘So thou hast torn thyself from thy precious writings at last, Will! Hath it ever crossed thy mind to test the scaffolding yonder? I trow not; for all thou carest, Carlotta may break her neck.’

‘Carlotta shall not sickerly,* good-wife: whether it shall sustain Dan† John of Canterbury is a moot question. Lottie, I take it, will abide within.’

* Surely.

† Short for Dominus.

‘Then thou takest it ill, Long Will. Lottie shall go where it liketh her.’

‘Whew! thou art not wont to be so kind to the poor wench.’

Dame Langland stirred with a vigour fired by the loftiest scorn.

‘Thou art like to be thinking,’ she said with a toss of her head, ‘that these gallants come hither to hear thee talk treason.’

‘They come to hear the grievances of the poor and the rank offences of the rich; to denounce with me the greed of the Mendicants and the pride of the abbots and archdeacons.’

‘Oh, indeed! Perhaps your wisdom also believes—and far be it from me to gainsay any belief so learnedly held—peradventure, I say, your wisdom believes—ahem . . .!’

‘Believes what? Your worldliness seems gravelled for matter!’*

‘Why! that the rats which bite our cheese come hither because they love to hear thee sing through the nose!’

‘Softly, huswife, softly! Prythee, do not aggravate thy voice so, or the folk outside will think we are playing Herod before the time. But, in sooth, what meanst? Why come all these my visitors so oft and many?’

‘Simply and merely to admire my daughter, William Langland!’

The poor poet stood aghast. What! had he preached in vain so long to deaf ears? and was it

* At a loss for an illustration.

to see a pretty face, and not to hear the great social problems of the day expounded, that crowds of men were constantly invading the privacy of his house? It might be!

‘Then meddle not, Master Langland, with matters that are deep enough to drown thy wits. Leave the ordering of our guests to me; and do thou think on thy Piers Ploughman, thy Do-bet, and Lady Meed; so shall our fortunes be better served.’

‘Sweet wife, I shall do so,’ said Langland sadly; and he went forth into the street, stricken as by a heavy blow.

For when a man who feels the prophetic spirit stirring within him is flouted and sneered at by them of his own household, the world is apt to seem to such a one a groat too dear.

So Long Will strolled listlessly into the wide space hard by the ‘Tun.’ His eyes looked into vacancy, his back was bowed, and his long dark hair fell loosely about his face, so that he seemed as one distraught. Just now he was depressed over-much, and thought of himself as only a poor clerk, the singer of an idle day, unbeneficed, unnoticed by great or small—one of those many children of genius whom Nature, prodigal in untimely births, loves to squander in an ungrateful soil. He was deeply smitten by the conviction that his life’s work had been in vain.

Yet, cheer thee, Will Langland, for all thy sombre musings. The day shall come when Englishmen shall acknowledge thee to have been one of the great ones of thy century, thy poem a prime mover in the great social revolt against the oppression of law and custom, and the misery of serfdom.

Hark! he is murmuring to himself in his deep bass voice some lines from his own poem :

“Then waked I of my wynkge ; and woe was witha^d
That I ne had slept sounder, and yseighen^e more.
I sat softly adown, and said my Belief,
And so I babbled on my beads : they brought me asleep.”

And for a time Long Will seemed to be babbling on his beads, praying for strength, methinks, and courage to steer right on. Soon the cloud clears from his brow, and he brightens and trolls out a merrier note, forgetting that he is overheard and shall be applauded by the gathering crowd :

“All that I may swink[†] or sweat,
My wife it will both drink and eat ;
An I say aught, she will me beat :
If I say aught of her but good,
She looketh at me as she was wode,[‡]
And will me clout about the hood.”

‘Why! a good-den to ye, my merry minstrel!’

The exclamation came from a short and rather stout man, of about forty years. He wore a long dark robe and hood, a yellow-tawny beard, forked, a comely, regular face, smooth of cheek, with large blue eyes downcast, and drooping eyelids; a knife harnessd hung from his neck, of silver gilt.

‘What! Master Chaucer! Thou art come abroad to study characters for thy pilgrims, I’ll warrant thee.’

‘Hush! man; I told thee my purposed poem was a secret.’

* Seen.

† Labour at.

‡ Mad.

'True! but these knaves shall not construe my words aught. Wilt have standing-room on our scaffold to see the pageants?'

'Yea, heartily; for I am some-deal vexed at home of a stormy wife.'

'Shake hands, Dan Geoffrey, shake hands! The same storm which shakes thy peace hath even been galling me this very even!'

The two poets clasped hands, and laughed over their little troubles.

'I trow, 'tis not so exceeding a storm as that of January the 15th, 1362, eh, friend Will? That same puffed down the spire of Norwich Cathedral.'

'Aye, the south-west wind on Saturday at even. No; we poets shall not be puffed to earth, I hope, as easily as plum-trees! But come thy ways, and stand the brunt of my tempest, Master Chaucer.'

Carlotta had meanwhile tripped into her mother's kitchen.

'Sonties! Peter! What, girl? When hadst thou all that new gear?'

'I had it of Lady Fitz-Warren, mother. She said she was much beholden to me for walking out with Alice.'

Dame Langland was pacified, and proceeded to examine the dress. Carlotta wore a gown of grass-green; her girdle was of white cloth, embroidered with little birds, and enriched with golden studs. Her black hair was braided with gold wire and coloured ribbons; her kerchief secured by a rich bodkin. The edges of her hood and sleeves were out and slashed into the figure of leaves. Altogether

she looked very fine in contrast to her mother, who wore russet and a barm-cloth, or apron, of falding.*

Dame Langland seemed quite satisfied with her daughter's appearance.

'La! I never saw thee pranked so fine aforetime! There is something at the bottom of it, I trow. If I were thou, Lottie, I would cast off that yellow-haired gallant—Alured of Dene is he not cleped?†—and bid for the other squire with the brown eyes and broad shoulders.'

'Mother, this talk is all unmaidenly! I may not look upon Master Standish, whate'er be the colour of his eyne; for I like him not.'

'Silly wench! They do tell me that his father is a rich knight of Kent.'

At this moment Dan Chaucer entered with Langland, and the former, catching up the dame's last words, said with a merry laugh:

'A knight of Cales, a gentleman of Wales, a laird of the North Countree,
A yeoman of Kent with his yearly rent shall buy them out,
all three.'

'Well said, Master Chaucer,' quoth the dame; 'as a rule, I have no great opinion of your poets, but there is sense in that, at all events.'

'Thank you, dame. Oh! Mistress Carlotta, when I see thee there smiling full simple and coy, my heart goes back to other days.'

'Get along with thee, Dan Chaucer, and leave such follies for younger heads,' said the dame; for she spied Alured and Standish coming.

* Coarse cloth.

† Called.

The guests now bestowed themselves upon the scaffold. Alured, of course, contrived to sit by Carlotta. But when Dan John of Canterbury, the gigantic monk of Westminster, essayed to mount the scaffold, that edifice creaked and groaned so loud that the lewd folk in the street cheered and pointed the finger of scorn.

Howbeit the giant very good-humouredly took up a standing position on the ground, resting his chin comically on the top of the scaffold, whereat the folk broke into new laughter.

‘Oh, mind not me! All a-blowing and a-growing!’ he shouted; ‘and when I wax tired and lack watering, I shall sit on this water-butt as by law established, and take root, too—you’ll see!’

‘How pretty the street looks, Master Alured!’ said Carlotta; ‘all the doors decorated with green birch, long fennel, and white lilies, and St. John’s wort.’

‘Yea; but wait till it grow dark, and they light the coloured lamps and the bonfires. Then shall we have hobby-horses, and monsters, and devils, and dancing and carolling. There is no nation like us for excellent fooling, as I have heard.’

‘Well, they clepe it “Merry England;” but to hear my father speak on’t, one would fancy we were on the eve of a great revolt of the people.’

‘Pah! thy father is—forgive me for saying it, Carlotta—but thy father thinketh he can read the times better than statesmen and archbishops.’

As Alured spake, a crowd of country labourers was passing, tilers and dykers and carpenters. One of them was pointing towards the scaffold on which

Langland was standing, his tall, spare figure being very plainly visible, as the others were sitting.

‘Long life to the maker* of “Piers Ploughman!”’ they shouted aloud, doffing cap and waving horny hands. ‘Long life to the friend of the poor, swinked† churl! May God defend him! Hurrah! hurrah!’

The cry was taken up by the London apprentices, and a perfect storm of cheers and blessings broke from every throat, while Will Langland stood smiling through his tears, too choked for utterance.

Dame Langland came forth at the hubbub, and could scarce be made to comprehend that the folk were cheering her Will. Then she raised her skinny arm aloft and cried:

‘Aye, boys, God bless him! I always said he was the biggest maker in London town. Hurrah for Long Will!’

When Langland saw even his wife carried away by the enthusiasm, he sobbed and hid his face from the people by leaning towards the wall. But Chaucer rose and grasped his hand heartily, saying:

‘I wish thee all joy in this thy true triumph, Will. By Heaven! I am stirred by the scene—I may not tell thee how—it comes as a revelation to me in very sooth! What! have I written to please lordings and fine ladies by the score, and is all the heart of England waiting to hear us strike a note that shall reverberate true to their deepest feelings? Henceforth I write for the lewd‡ folk, not for the clerk, nor yet for earls nor knights. See! they march on—their

* Author.

† Hard-worked.

‡ Unlearned.

honest faces beam with gratitude. Doff thy cap, man ; wave thy hand ; say something to them.'

'Friends,' said the poet-satirist, baring his head to the people, 'I never thought to see this day—never thought that words of mine could have been so generously understood. For I have been no flatterer of the people ; I have chid you sharply for your offences, as tho' ye had been lordings surfeiting in wantonness. I have bid the waster go work, and scorn not half-penny ale ; I have chid the workman who will not labour, but if he be highly hired, saying :

"But I warn you, workmen, win ye while ye may,
For hunger hiderward hasteth him fast."

And now let me thank you all for your large-hearted verdict, giving only this last rede,* that none curse the King and all his council ; but bear ye in patience hunger and swynke, and abide by the law till it be made better.'

'There were fierce faces in that motley throng,' said Standish to the giant ; 'men who seemed to scowl when they looked on thee and me.'

'They are wolves, I greatly misdoubt ; we shall have trouble in the land, but an if they be not kept under like rats.'

'They have stopped hard by the Mermaid Tavern yonder.'

'That shall not like them : how they will grumble when they learn our city law against regrating and selling of wines on high holidays.'

Meanwhile the chevauchés, or mounted proces-

* Advice.

sions, were coming in sight : first the Mayor and Aldermen, clad in their robes of state, with maces and swords and golden chains ; then the guilds and livery companies, each in its distinctive dress of many colours, with banners blowing in the wind and trumpets blaring in fine discord. For there rode, beside the great fraternities of the Mercers, the Drapers, the Fishmongers, and the Linen Armourers, or Merchant Taylors, many a smaller guild not yet incorporated, such as the Braziers, the Sporiers, the Grossers, the Poulterers, the Bowyers, the Vintners, the Skinners, the Salters, the Armourers, and the Glovers. Into none of these could a churl, or base-born son, be admitted ; into none could dishonest trading effect an entrance, so far as the wardens could prevent it. By the side of the banner marched the Bedel, plump and pompous, the Chaplain in his surplice, and the Clerk in his gown of black silk. When all had gone by to St. Paul's for vespers, then the streets filled again with musicians, jongleurs, telling a merry tale, or performing feats of agility, and, lastly, the parish clerks of London, who were formed into a guild, and were wont to enact miracle-plays on movable stages.

The parish clerks then came on the scene, clad in kirtles of light cloth, red hose, and over all a gay surplice, 'as white as the blossom upon the rise,' so Dan Chaucer said, adding of one parish clerk he knew :

'A merry child he was, so God me save ;
Well could he leten blood, and clip and shave,
And make a charter of lond and a quittance ;
In twenty manner could he trip and dance,
(After the school of Oxenfordè tho).'

A high scaffold was brought on, set on four wheels, and having two rooms, or stages, an upper and a lower—the latter to dress in, the former to act on. One company enacted the Flood and the building of the Ark, the comic character being supplied for the nonce by Noah's wife, who had no great opinion of Noah, and did not believe there was any necessity for such a fuss, and had at last to be pushed into the Ark backwards first.

Dame Langland shook her head over this, and said she was sure her Will had written the parts: it was just like his ribaldry. Whereat the others laughed, that she had put on the cap so readily.

A second company presented the story of the shepherds watching on the hills: they were taking their frugal supper on the hill-side, and first one and then another began to air his grievances—real grievances these—of the poor of the day: so that the hungry crowd were hushed to catch every point, and took it up promptly with cheer and laughter. Here, too, there was a comic character in the person of a sheep-stealer, who was caught in the act, and placed without more ado in the pillory. But all at once the flute and tabor and viol were heard, and every ribald voice was hushed as real angels (little children) were seen to descend and hover above the shepherds. Then was it marvellous to see how, at the ringing of a little bell, all that vast concourse of spectators fell on their knees to hear how the child Jesus had come into the world to draw all men unto Him. Many a wet face showed the religious emotion which the rude picture had evoked. So near together lie

the fountain of laughter and the fountain of tears. Then, when the company had watched the procession of the Liveries ride back from Paul's, there was a space of twilight before the dark came on, and this was filled by timely eating and drinking, and telling of stories on the part of Dan Chaucer and John of Canterbury.

The little room to which they had all repaired was never so full of guests as to-night. Alured could scarce whisper a word in Carlotta's ear but someone would mark it ; yet in the dusky corner he caught her soft hand, and would not let it go, struggle as she would. So with a heart throbbing wildly, this lowly maiden resigned herself to her fate, gave the Archbishop's squire all her love, and drank in from his pleading blue eyes an intoxicating draught of passion.

It was a good thing for the lovers that Dan Chaucer laughed so heartily over the giant's humorous sallies, and that the Westminster monk spoke so fast and so loud ; for only under cover of the general mirth dare they whisper from time to time those sweet nonentities which youth regards as the immortal substitutes for the luscious cates* and sweetmeats of childhood.

* Dainties,

CHAPTER VIII.

AND now the summer twilight was fast fading away. In Langland's upper room it grew so dark that, in spite of a cresset which blazed in the window, all within was mirk, but not gloom; for peals of laughter had just greeted a merry story which the shy, quiet-spoken Chaucer had but now related.

'Bencite! Dan Chaucer,' said Dame Langland, when the laugh subsiding had allowed her to gasp out a word—'Bencite! but when thou wert sitting there so mum I little thought there was such matter of mirth in thy pate. 'Tis better than Dan John's, I protest.'

'Oh, for side-splitting fun commend me to your quiet, drooping-eyed, mealy-mouthed melancholy martyrs!' said the giant. 'As for me, I gave up telling of humorous anecdotes ever since I gat that fright in the Abbey yonder.'

'What was that?' they all cried, edging nearer to each other.

The monk began in a solemn, awful tone, which thrilled Carlotta:

'Ye ken what old Robert Manning saith of us merry monks:

"If thou hauntest to make thy play
At the tavern on holy day,

To many one cometh therefore evil,
Thro' cumberancè of the devil.
For a tavern is the devil's knife,
It slayeth thee, either soul or life :
It wasteth thy body and maketh thee dry,
And gadereth lechours to gluttonye."

Too true indeed ! and the time was, not so long ago, that I craved leave from my prior to go abroad as though on works of mercy, yet in sooth to have a revel at the Mermaid yonder with good fellowship. Well, it so happed that one of our brethren fell ill. A sickness took him full grim, so that he presently died, and was laid to rest under the cloister-stones. A few days after the funeral I chanced to stay behind the brethren after matins—'twas not long past midnight. The frères* thought I had remained to pray, but, to tell sooth, I had fallen on sleep, being weary and over-wrought with the day's merry-making. When I awoke, the Abbey church was all dim-mirk, only the moon looked coldly through the windows of the south transept. I started up to return to the dornitory, and as I passed the altar I louted† low on one knee ; but, all of a sudden, I blenched,‡ and my hair stood on end, for there, before the steps of the altar, sat a foul thing and a grisly, a-gnawing of his brenning§ tongue, the which he kept spitting out, making the while a wondrous wry face, full ill to behold. I called on myself stoutly. Quoth I to myself, " John of Canterbury ! be a man of thy inches ! Remember that thou art a foot taller than the biggest brother in the cloister ! Put away faint

* Westminster monks spoke French.

† Kneelt.

‡ Turned white.

§ Burning.

heart, gather up these knocking knees, and go accost the foul thing yonder !”’ . The monk paused. There was a stir in the listening group, a suppressed murmur of sympathy. ‘ I forced myself to go anear him as he sat gnawing and making hideous mowes before the high altar. “ Beast !—evil beast !” quoth I, “ I conjure thee, in the name of Heaven, tell me why thou sittest there a-gnawing horribly of thy brenning tongue !” At that the grisly monster looked on me, and I fell down my length on the pavement before him in a dead swoon. Only I heard him say as plainly as I can hear the curfew ring o’ nights, “ I was thy brother who died last week. Ye all thought me a pious monk ; but, alas ! I was a backbiter, speaking evil of better men than I ; and now my tongue is all on fire, and I cannot get rid of it ; but I sit here spitting before the altar till crow of cock, then away again to Purgatory. But I charge thee, brother, leave off thy haunting of taverns, for the foul fiend is even now making room for such as thou.” Ay de mi ! At prime the brethren found me still lying stark by the altar-steps ; but the grisly beast had gone to its own place. I haunt no taverns now, I thank God ; yet must I still laugh and have my frolic jest. God forgive me if I sin !’

There was a long silence ; no one cared to speak light words after this confession. But the merry note of a horn outside called them to the window, and there were the City Watch, 2,000 strong, marching in a great procession, of whom 940 carried lanterns on long poles. Besides these there were 2,000 of the marching-watch, archers clad in white

fustian, bearing the arms of the City broidered on back and breast ; pikemen, too, and halberdiers with burnished corselets ; then came the artillery of the Tower, more dangerous then to friend than to foe ; and after them mummers and antics, masked revellers and timbrel-girls of Southwark. The bonfires were lit and the torches spluttered ; the apprentices sang and shouted and danced : the whole City was in a mad uproar.

Alured had persuaded Carlotta to walk forth. They came upon a mountebank who was amusing the folk with his rag-man-roll.* He had a bundle of parchment from which hung various coloured ribbons. The game was to choose and draw one, and thereby read your fortune.

Alured pulled a string, and read :

‘ Cowardice it is, and foul maistry, to throw a falcon at every fly ;’

the which motto gave his worship a pang, for was he not playing with the affections of this simple girl ? However, he threw off the thought, and, with a forced laugh, bade Carlotta pull a string.

‘ Alas ! my damsel, many a false flatour †
Is in your house, and many a losengour ‡
That pleasen you well more—aye, by my faith !
Than he that sothfastnesse unto you saith.’

‘ Oh ! Alured, how weird and fearsome things have grown since the monk told us the tale of the grisly thing ! And I have seen ill faces in the crowd yonder—and one I think I know for a churl ; and methinks

* Afterwards rigmarole. † Flatterer. ‡ Deceiver.

I saw three men haunting about my father's door yonder.'

'Pish! thou hast caught the megrims from the monk's long face—howsoever, we can look within, an thou list.'*

There was indeed a pretty coil toward in the kitchen, for three men were threatening Dame Langland with voice and fist, while she was by turns reviling, praying, and sobbing; nor could she call for help, since one man guarded the stairs and another the door.

Carlotta was the first to enter the house.

'Oh! hither cometh the lass who played me so ill a turn in Highgate woods! We want thee, my pretty mistress; thou art no better than thou shouldst be; we must cut short thy bonny black hair, and dress thee in a red cap, and set a white wand in thy hand, and hail thee off to Dokum.'†

Carlotta opened wide eyes of fear, but, instantly shaking off the summoner's hand from her shoulder, she shouted:

'Alured, to the rescue!'

Alured hurried in; but, not taking in the situation for the gloom, stood a moment on the doorstep with his sword half drawn.

'Put up thy badelaire,‡ friend, or thou wilt be fined half a mark for drawing in the City, or, if thou hast no coins, shalt go to Newgate for fifteen days.'

'What is all this gear, my masters?' asked Alured.

'It is all according to law—look at this sheepskin, Master Squire. Here be the story in fair Latin—half

* If thou like. † The prison for women. ‡ Short-sword.

a noble due for rent ; sleeves for changing, fourpence ; a gallon of Rhenish, eightpence ; a goose, threepence ; fine for being at the tavern after eight o' th' evening, one penny. That mounts to four shillings and two groats.'

'And what hast thou to do with it ?'

'See ! I have bought up Master Langland's debts ; they are due to me.'

'Yea,' whimpered Dame Langland, wiping one eye with a corner of her balm-cloth ; 'but the licorous caitiff made most cruel proposals to me anent it, and said if I did not let him take Carlotta away, he would accuse her of light behaviour, and carry her off thro' Chepe as a common jade.'

'Did he ? Then he shall pay for his insolence !'

Alured's blade was out in a moment, and his back against a wall ; but the three men made as though they would assault him with such missiles as they could command. The sword had bitten deeply into the summoner's arm, and set him yelling like a bleeding pig, when Carlotta ran forth to seek help. The scaffold was empty, as their guests were strolling round by the Tun* and the Weigh-house,† but she saw John Standish listening to a Dominican, or preaching friar, who was improving the occasion across the street.

'Oh ! Master Standish, do come and help us ; we are sore beset by knaves.'

'At thy command, if the cause be fair,' said Standish calmly, and followed the maid.

* A gaol in Cornhill.

† Where foreign wares were weighed.

But when he found his friend attacked by three men, and saw the glint of Alured's red sword in the fitful light made by the fire, he shouted :

‘How now? Peace there! Stand back, caitiffs!’

With every exclamation he thrust back a man, and reached Alured's side.

‘Put up thy sword, man; it is against the law of the City. Beware! I have the strength of an ox. I am John Standish, the same who has won the wrestling prize at Smithfield the last two Easters; if ye will bear it peaceably, good; but if not, then take heed, for I shall dash out your brains against this good woman's chopping-block.’

The men fell back sullenly; Dame Langland opened the controversy anew with her tongue; Alured joined in; the summoner contradicted him; the two men stood on tip-toe and swore; Carlotta wept; Standish stamped his foot, for he could hear neither this nor that distinctly. When all were out of breath, he said in a quiet tone :

‘Alured, take the women upstairs, and leave me to settle with this scum.’

Alured hesitated.

‘Fear not, lad; I could squeeze them to death like conies,* had I a mind to.’

When the others had gone up the stairs, Standish said to the summoner :

‘How much sayst thou is owing?’

‘Four shillings and eightpence, and all owned to by the dame.’

* Rabbits.

‘Very good ; here is the money. Now make me out a quittance, signed.’

Standish plucked a brand from the fire, and one man blew it into a blaze, while the summoner wrote out a quittance of the debt.

Still they waited about.

‘What lack ye further ?’ said Standish.

‘I would speak with the women anon.’

‘Thou wilt not ! Begone, begone, dirty knaves ! There, an ye will withstand me, so shall ye get a fall for your pains, ye puppets.’

In fact, so rudely had Standish thrust them backwards through the door, that the first had fallen, and the other two had stumbled over him, so that they lay in the street like a sack of apples in unstable equilibrium.

‘Have they gone yet ?’ cried Dame Langland in a hoarse whisper from the top of the ladder.

‘Yea, dame ; I have paid them home,’ said Standish, smiling to himself at the double meaning.

‘No fear of the Bedell of the Ward making an uproar ?’

‘No fear ; I paid them with my fist.’

‘Tis a great matter to have a son so strong. I am sure Carlotta and I thank you heartily—don’t we, Lottie ?’

‘Yea, sickerly ; we owe much to both the young gentles.’

But Carlotta’s brightest smile was reserved for Alured of Dene.

Langland brought Master Chaucer in to quaff a cup of wine before going home, and he must needs

call upon his host and the company each to indite a verse, and toss the couplets into the big bowl which stood on the table.

Then Master Langland was to read out the productions, which he did amid a good deal of merriment; but at last he came to a paper which seemed to surprise him, for he stammered, and was about to place it in his bosom, when Chaucer said:

‘No secret ditties! all must be read pert* and open.’

‘It is writ in Latin—and is something privy,† as I ween.’

‘Nay, an it be so mysterious, I must know it,’ said the dame.

‘Hark ye, then,’ said Langland; ‘it is no rhyme, nor yet alliteration, but a piece of prose—the fairest I have seen for many a day. But how it came hither, I suspect Master Chaucer alone knows.’ Langland passed the document to the poet with a smile. ‘It was very kindly done and thought on,’ he went on; ‘but though there was a fine delicacy in the giving, I may not let thee go unthanked.’

Chaucer shook his head, and said, as he returned the document:

‘It is none o’ my doing, Will. I suspect one of these gallants must have been trying to win thy favour—ask them!’

But Alured of Dene and John Standish were already bidding good-even to the women, and so Langland was left standing with the sheepskin in his hand, looking quite mystified.

When Dame Langland returned from escorting

* Above-board.

† Private.

her guests through the kitchen, she snatched the paper from her husband, read it, and exclaimed :

‘ We are in luck !—the money so long due is paid ! Where’s Lottie ? Lottie ! Lottie ! Come hither, lass !’

‘ Let her be, wife : what hath she to do with the money ?’

Carlotta came in, her cheeks flushed, her ear burning.

‘ What is it, mother ? I did but hold the cresset while they were going.’

‘ Thou art a poor, cockered wanton ; thy father should be ashamed, letting thee trifle thy life away with vain persons, when good men and true are seeking to gain thy grace !’

‘ Sonties, mother ! what dost mean ?’

‘ Aye, dame, what’s in the wind to-night ? Resolve us,* prythee.’

Dame Langland told her husband how the three men had come into her kitchen, threatening her if she did not pay, and how she had left Master Standish to deal with them.

‘ And who else could have paid the debt, and who else deserves to win our pretty child, if not Master Standish ?’

‘ Mother, am I to be bought for a few groats ?’ said Carlotta sadly.

‘ Nay, my lass,’ said her father, ‘ mind her not ; thou shalt wed with him only who can win thy heart of hearts. We are not so poor, thank God ! but that we can afford to do thee justice.’

* Explain to us.

Carlotta kissed her father's hand; perhaps if he had ordered her to wed with the summoner she would have done it, so strong was her sense of duty and obedience to him, because she had been treated by him with the frank confidence of a friend, as well as with the tender love of a parent.

'Well! I never saw such folly!' exclaimed the dame. 'Carlotta, thou shouldst know thy duty better, and thy father so kind and generous, too!'

'Mother! mother! hast thou no pity for me?'

'No, none whatsoever. I knew how it would fare with us, as soon as I saw what a swart, smutterlich thing thou wert in thy cradle. Said I: "She will be cursed and crooked in will, and we shall have small solace from her." Nay! cry not, Lottie! I only say what is sooth. Heaven sent thee to us, and we must even make the best of a sorry bargain.'

Dame Langland gave point to her pious resignation by sniffing, and giving the wooden cups a shrewd jostling, as she ostentatiously cleared the table.

'It was passing kind in Master Standish, doubtless,' said Carlotta, after a pause, 'to pay our debt; but an he did it to win my love, that is not the way to go about it!' And she coloured with scorn.

'Nay, Calote,' said her father; 'judge not the young man so hastily. My creed is that he did it to help me, and not at all as caring for thee, my sly piece of vanity.'

'An it be so, father, I shall begin to think with little Willie, that Master Standish is a worthy, amicable gentleman. God bless him!'

Dame Langland nodded across the table appro-

vingly at the poet, and her smile seemed to say, 'Well said, my poor simpleton! thou hast shot a bolt in the clout* by mere hazard—well said for thee!'

'Help! help! Your guests are in peril of their lives!'

The cry came from the kitchen; it was the voice of an old goody who lived hard by.

Langland hastened down.

'What is toward, good dame?'

'The City is up! the apprentices are pursuing the Archbishop's squires. They affirm that their privileges have been broken, and a man has been wounded by a sword drawn in this house.'

Carlotta drew a crucifix from her bosom and retired to her bower.

* Bull's-eye.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Alured of Dene and John Standish went forth from Langland's house, they passed along Cornhill in peace, but marked how the Drapers' apprentices pointed at them and whispered together.

'We must stand together this night,' said Standish, 'and show a bold front, or this rabblement shall have us by the ears ere we win to Lambeth.'

When they had crossed the Wall-brook, and got through the Poultry, and were in the wide space of Chepe, the threats grew more open :

'These be the same springalds who drew on the summoner ; let us beat them about the pate.'

'Let us make for the Queen's Wardrobe,' said Alured, referring to a fortress which stood a little south-west of St. Paul's.

'I trow not : Knights' Riders Street is so narrow. 'Twere better to seek grith* in some sanctuary nearer at hand—St. Martin's le Grand, perhaps.'

They forced their way through the crowd, and entered the sacred precincts not too soon, for hardly had the door closed upon them than the summoner appeared with some of the City watch, all armed. But the extreme sanctity of this asylum saved them from further insults ; after some howling and cursing

* Shelter.

without, the most part melted away, leaving a guard to watch the exits.

The priest who was on duty near the high altar heard their story, and seemed to sympathize with them in their trouble, offering to send a messenger to the Palace at Lambeth.

But John Standish said :

‘Not so. I would not embroil my dear master with the civic power. He hath incurred unpopularity enough already in Gaunt’s behalf. No! Send word to John of Canterbury, the Monk of Westminster. He shall devise something for us.’

So the two squires lay down in their cloaks hard by the altar, conjuring up such fearsome fancies as the witching hour, the ghostly aisles, the winking tapers of chapel and tomb, combined to evoke.

A few minutes after dawn the genial voice of the giant awoke them from their uneasy slumbers.

‘How now? Where be your worships? Where be these same cut-throats?’

A silent grasp of the hand, a murmured thanks, and the three men were whispering together about their plan of escape.

‘I should like to wrap you—the twain of you—in a bale of cloth. I will then carry you forth through the guard without, and ye are safe.’

Standish shook his head.

‘If the one of us should drop out, there would be old coil.’

‘’Twould be pitch and pay, and no mistake,’ laughed Alured.

‘I shall do it,’ said the monk, chuckling like a boy

over the fun of the thing. 'Where be our friend, the Custos Gemmarum? Hi, there! Master Sleepy-sides; wake up! or I shall denounce thee for thy sin of sloth. I am really surprised that the draw-blanket fiend, good Master "Terlyncel," should overcome thee so readily!'

The monk's dramatic power, his deep tones, and solemn warning alarmed the clerk's uneasy conscience. He hastened to make humble apology.

'I pray thee, dom'ne Johannes, say no more about that same Terlyncel, as the lewd folk call the Sloth-fiend; for, in sooth, I was meditating on the first penitential psalm when my studies were broken short.'

'Oh!'

The giant made so comical and so long a face of doubt, tempered by pained surprise, that the two squires could not but laugh.

'Now, my brother,' said the monk, 'do not stand there, feeling for thy brains at the postern of thy scull, for thou mightest knock all day for them and never a "*Deo gratias*"* should reward thee for thy pains. Nay, do not grin like a Barbary ape, but go fetch me some hangings or tapestry to wind these gentles in. Dost hear, stolidissime?'

The clerk from abject fear had passed to childish merriment. He placed his two hands on his knees, and bowed himself in half-suppressed cachinnations ill-suited to the place.

But a smart reminder of the tenderness of all human flesh made him straighten himself with a sudden jerk. His grinning mouth suddenly pursed

* The reply of a porter.

itself into its usual hypocritical lines of piety, and he hobbled away, clattering with slipshod feet on the echoing pavement.

‘Now, if I have over-played my part, this poor fool shall go and rouse the watch.’

‘I think that last suggestion made by thy foot hath bred in him a wholesome obedience,’ said Standish.

‘I should not wonder if he brought us all the painted cloth* out of the sacristy,’ said Alured.

‘Shall this suffice, good Master Monk?’

The clerk had returned with a pile of hangings, which he spread out on the floor of the church.

‘A good clerk! Here is a penny, which thou canst lay out religiously, I doubt not—eh?’

John of Canterbury extended his hand.

‘Truly, I shall endeavour so to . . .’

‘Stop! On second thoughts, I remember me I may not squander the property of my convent—tho’ it be the richest in England. These gentles shall tickle thy palm, I doubt not.’

‘I thank it,’ said the clerk, pocketing his *douceur* with an air of holy resignation which was not lost upon the two squires.

John of Canterbury now motioned to them to lie down on the cloth.

‘Pack them up, brother, pack them up!—no ends hanging out, please! no stray legs making unseemly revelations! That becomes me! I will take them side by side, pretty dears, like two puppets for the marionettes at Bartholomew Fair. Help to heave them up! Hi!’

* Tapestry.

The clerk, seeing the giant fairly encumbered by his two friends, was able to grow imbecile once more, and fell a-tittering.

But the giant gravely lifted one leg, as he fixed the clerk's eye with a mysterious look, and took a step into that gentleman's cassock.

On emerging from the shadow of the church portico, the giant spoke to certain of the guard, who nodded over their bows and bills.

'Have ye not seen my Lord Abbot's waggon? Gramercy! what a thing is this—to let me carry all this church furniture down to Paul's!—too bad!'

The men laughed. All knew the giant of Westminster and his pleasant wit. They even apologized for not leaving their post and running down to Petty Canons to fetch the carter.

'That seemeth heavy gear,' quoth the Captain of the Watch, raising his arm.

'By St. Peter! spare to strike, Master Officer, or thou wilt knock a nose off this statue, and mar Abbot Littleington's building!'

'Aye, my Lord Abbot would make a goodly coil indeed. What is't?'

'A secret, till 'tis set up. Thou wottest the ways of great architects. They will have all kept mum, till . . . But I must go find my waggon.'

John of Canterbury strode along under his double burden. The streets were waking up into life; apprentices were taking down shutters from windows; milk-boys were coming along with pails; so the giant turned into St. Paul's Churchyard, and set the squires down by Paul's Cross, at the north-west

corner. There he did carefully unfold them, to their delight.

‘Got all your noses? ’Tis well! What! one of ye wrong side uppermost—standing on thy head, eh? There! Now let us march on. But ye must wrap round your bodies some of this stuff, for if the porter at Ludgate see the Lambeth cognizance, then shall he stay us like felons.’

As they passed through Ludgate the porter looked forth, and was for questioning who walked out so early in such ferly guise. But the tall monk questioned with him, so that he was put from his purpose.

‘Hast heard the news, goodman porter?’

‘No, sickerly! Pray, Dan John, what is’t?’

‘Hum! They say there is to be a new porter at Ludgate.’

‘I crave thy grace! Speak under thy breath: a new porter, saidst thou?’

‘Yea, verily. The Mayor and Aldermen say that thou art too kindhearted to savage dogs and lepers. “Gentle dogs,” the City law saith, “may go free;” but thou hast no discretion in dogs. Lepers must stand without and beg with bag, bowl, and clapper, but thou art but indifferent keen in winding a leper.’

‘Now, by St. Peter! who told thee this leasing?’*

‘The same man who told me that when thy chamber roof had been raised the new porter should take possession.’

‘What new porter? As I am an honest man, Dan John—oh! my poor wife and bairns! Oh! my pig! Oh! my . . .’

* Lie.

Dan John suddenly clapped him on the back, saying :

‘Cheer thee, man. They have made me City porter, but I tell them I may not be spared at Westminster. Good-day to thee!’

And he left the man chuckling over his pleasant surprise.

John of Canterbury found his two friends waiting for him by the booth of the officer whose duty it was to exact the pavage, or tax of one penny upon all carriages carrying objects of merchandise.

‘Pah! ye should have gone further, while I questioned with that man of sparres* and bolts; the City is so very strict with all strangers sojourning within its walls, that if one shall abide a night and a day, the host must answer for him, take him into his frank-pledge. Ye should have crept forth further afield.’

‘’Tis all in good time now,’ said Alured; ‘we are beyond the jurisdiction of Master John de Northampton—that meddler.’

‘Nay!’ said Standish; ‘if report saith true, he doth take more pains to purify the City than the Bishop of London. ’Twas but yesterday I saw a procession of ill creatures led with tabor and bagpipe through Chepe on their way to Dokum.’†

‘The Mayor doth strangely usurp the ecclesiastical functions,’ said the monk, feeling a little professional jealousy.

‘Howbeit, there are rules yonder too strait for this age,’ brake in Alured; ‘to shut the taverns at curfew

* Bars.

† Prison.

is scant courtesy ; to permit no strong drinks to be sold on feast-days and holidays is downright tyranny ; and to strike off a man's head for but bathing in the Tower fosse is just absurd.'

'When thou art King of London—thou and thy father-in-law,' said John Standish, with a wicked look at his friend—'we shall have open markets and free towns, no taxes, no road or harbour dues.'

'Yea ; and before that, if the great lords don't open their eyes soon, or my father-in-law, as thou call'st him, is led astray.'

So talking they had passed along Fleet Street, past Clifford's Inn and the Bishop of Salisbury's hostel, past the Church and Priory of the Whitefriars and the Temple, just vacated by the Knights Hospitallers.

Here they had to stand awhile uncovered while the Host was borne by, with chaunt and tinkling bell, to some sick person.

As they drew near St. Clement's Well, where some maidens and loiterers were already congregated, a man clad in russet followed them as far as the Bishop of Chester's hostel,* and, touching the arm of Standish, said in his ear :

'Twere best to make speed, master ; thou art marked.'

'Thanks, good friend, whoever thou art, for thy much courtesy.'

'What ! is thy friend a Lollard ?' said the monk to Alured.

Alured looked at Standish for an explanation.

* Now Somerset House.

The latter coloured a little, as he said somewhat apologetically :

‘I—I have once or twice listened to those people—out of curiosity, ye may guess—and the fellow may have recognised me.’

As they had to press on, no more notice was taken.

‘We might have gone for refuge to Savoy Palace,’ said Alured ; ‘for Master Chaucer hath charge of the same.’

‘Let us get forward,’ said the monk, ‘for I wish not to have the carrying of you overgrown babes out of any more cradles ; in sooth, I trow ye shall both be ready for your bottle when I get you to sanctuary at St. Peter’s. If they follow us, we still can fly to our oratory at St. Martin-in-the-Fields.’

They hurried past the King’s Mews, by the Cross at Charing, and made straight for the gardens* of the Archbishop of York, into which they were admitted on a sign being made by the monk to the porter. After passing through the gardens, they got into the King’s Road, and now the great walls of the monastery were before them. Diverging a little to the right, they crossed the long ditch, and so gained an entrance through the western gateway, by an outer and an inner archway, into the great outer court, or ‘The Elms,’ as it was called, from the large trees planted round it.

They had now ‘the Sanctuary’ on their left, a massive Norman fortress, containing two churches, an upper and a lower ; but the monk went straight across

* Spring Gardens.

the great court, leaving the almonry on the right, and, passing to the left of the granaries with their high central tower, and the oxstalls, he led his friends through a third archway into the southern cloister of the Abbey.

The service of prime was then being sung, and the rise and fall of the chaunt was plainly audible as they stood a moment by the western door of the refectory ; for the great refectory ran parallel with the south cloister.

As the two squires gazed in awe at the splendour of the arcades and the beauty of the fresco-painting of the Nativity which adorned the southern wall of the cloister, Dan John said :

‘ Upon my fealty, I know not how best to bestow you. Stay ! there are two of the “playfellows” in the infirmary—until I can think of anything better—yes, that will serve the turn. Come your ways.’

So, striking his forehead for illumination, and striding along the middle tread* at a great pace, so that the squires had to amble in order not to be out-distanced, John of Canterbury led the way to the eastern side of the cloister, from which, by a winding stair, he climbed to the monks’ dormitory, bowing low before the great crucifix which stood by the staircase window.

In the dormitory he found two monks’ frocks.

‘ The very frocks,’ he muttered to himself, and then, with a low laugh : ‘ Get into these sacks, my infants, get in and spare not ; for they will be

* The central course of square stones.

out of church very presently. There! pull the cowls well about your ears, and none shall know ye.'

'But who are we?' asked Standish rather sulkily.

The giant laughed. It tickled him to see this sooth-fast, matter-of-fact squire, who was so point-device* in all his equipment, now half buried in the voluminous folds of a monk's hood.

'By St. Martin!' he said; 'but the hood does make the monk, whatever they may say. Look here, my children, yon door in the south cloister leads to the refectory. If I do not approach you before dinner-hour, be sure ye enter there by the buttery, and the great towels that hang by the press, and make straight for the second table on the right hand, and say nought to none: only, if any shall suspect you, say ye that Dom'nus Johannes of Canterbury sent you thither.'

'We shall surely be discovered; we speak no Latin,' grumbled Alured.

'Latin, quotha? This is, methinks, the only convent in England where Latin is never spoken. French alone, mark ye! French is our tongue, ever since the blessed Confessor's time. But at dinner we keep one Saxon custom: we always raise the wine-cup in both hands. Now, toward yon west cloister shall presently come the Master of the Novices and his boys for conning of their lessons, and your little friend from Lambeth should be there—the boy Langland.'

'True!' said Standish; 'we can send a message

* Precise.

by him or by another of the Archbishop's pages; for they all haunt hither for their schooling.'

'Yea; but I must school you further. Not a word must ye speak during dinner. It is severe penance, mark ye, if ye sit at meal with your hand on your chin, or leaning on the board with your elbows, or to stare rudely, or crack nuts with your teeth.'

As the monk gave his instructions, he was conducting them past the infirmary and through the little cloisters, then by St. Catharine's Chapel into the infirmary gardens, which were spacious and full of pleasant and sequestered nooks, whether under the shade of the damson-trees or by the side of the mill-stream which formed their western boundary.

'I think we can promise not to infringe the laws of courtesy at table,' said Standish a little drily, fidgeting and fuming under the burden of his great frock and cowl; 'but who are we? what monks' names are we supposed to go by? That's the matter most pressing.'

The giant opened wide eyes, partly of surprise at the irritability of his friend, partly at this new instance of the ingratitude of the human heart. He sighed prettily, as he replied:

'My warlike friend, prythee do not distress thyself about trifles. My conception is that ye twain are two doddering old brethren of this convent, who for the last fifty years have worn the cowl and now are promoted to the honourable rank of "play-fellow."'

'Playfellow?' asked Standish rather savagely.

'Aye, marry! That's the term, my son. There

are seven old brethren whom we style the "seven playfellows." There are only five abroad to-day, because two have a rheum which lets them from the garden. You will, with the other five, be exempt from the ordinary regulations. You can do as you like about attending divine office; you have a large liberty to censure, and—but, in sooth, Master Standish, thou look'st very black over it. More's the pity, for let me tell thee thou look'st the part to perfection.'

'I feel very like an old woman in petticoats,' grumbled Standish.

'Very right and proper,' said the monk as he drew Alured's cowl more over his face. 'This young squire is so tall that his legs will bewray him. Howbeit, he is douce and civil.'

Standish held out his hand, saying:

'Forgive my frowardness! I have been a very child for wantonness; and thou hast done much for us this day.'

The affectionate brown eyes of the monk glistened as he grasped the hand in silence, only murmuring:

'Un vrai chevalier!'

John of Canterbury went back to the prior of the cloister, and when he found him, knelt before him, saying:

'My father, I have committed a fault. I went forth before the sunrise, without leave asked, to aid some friends in distress.'

The prior, being just then rather annoyed, replied hastily:

'I know it. This is no uncommon sin of thine,

gadding about for vain show of thy shoulders and calves. I put thee to penance : go, brush the cobwebs from the ceiling of St. Edmund's Chapel, keep silence till sunset, and be not seen in cloister or refectory.'

'But—father . . .'

'But! thou naughty monk! get thee gone instantly—obey, or . . .'

The giant obeyed; but he said to himself:

'Oh, St. Peter! what will become of those unhappy squires?'

CHAPTER X.

‘SEND my squire of honour to me, Master Chamberlain; I am to sup with my Lord Abbot of Westminster this afternoon.’

‘I—I fancy Master Standish is not yet returned, your grace.’

The chamberlain looked up at the Archbishop with a deprecating glance, for he had known his master choleric on less sufficient grounds.

‘Not yet returned? Passing strange! Do you mean to tell me that he did not come home last night, after witnessing those follies on St. John’s eve? Quick, man! did he, or did he not?’

‘Oh! please your grace! I am put clean from my wits when my father . . .’

‘Tush! fool! send Alured of Dene to me without more ado.’

‘Ahem! I should gladly do so, of course, but . . .’

‘Now, by the rood of Bromholme! was ever any so ill served? If thy pate be not muddy with drinking of clarré, send him to me. Dost hear?’

‘When he is returned, I shall do so,’ said the chamberlain with a quiet dignity, meant to rebut the disgraceful imputation.

‘What! Dene away too? Why was I not told this before? Oh! how the stings of little things do make the greater life hard to live! Go, chamberlain, and seek them out.’

The Archbishop strode hastily up and down his solarium, at first in vexed silence, then with broken cries and ejaculations.

‘Alas! sin to sin—weakness to weakness—accusation to wrath! I am all too lenient with my household; then, when a misdeed comes to light, I fly into a fury of wrath—’tis much to be thought on! As for Alured, there was no stable foundation in him, but I should have schooled him home: I loved him out of wit;* but the wise proverb saith, “The lever child the more lore behöveth,”† and I have failed to chastise him as he needed.’

After some reflection the Archbishop struck twice upon the board.

‘Oh! good Master Chamberlain, give me thy hand in token that thou bearest me no grudge for my light words about drinking.’

‘My dear father!’ said the chamberlain, ‘rather give me thy blessing.’ And he knelt down with his arms folded across his chest.

Shortly after, the Lambeth barge had dropped down to the Abbot’s stairs in the mill-dyke, and left Simon of Sudbury and his suite. The bell of the great south gate of the convent warned Abbot Nicholas Littlington of the Archbishop’s arrival, and he courteously came forth to receive his guest

* Beyond reason.

† The dearer child needs the more schooling.

in 'The Elms.' Behind the Abbot came the two priors and the sub-priors. The two inferior sub-priors, or 'spies of the cloister,' as they were called, remained standing by the archway leading into the cloister.

As they entered the western cloister, all the novices and boys, who sat in rows writing or answering of challenges, rose up to do worship to the Abbot and his distinguished guest.

Simon of Sudbury lifted his two fingers and murmured a benediction, then with the shrewd glance of a practical mind took in all the salient features—the mats spread upon the seat by the wall, the hay strewn under the stools, the glazed windows of the upper tracery of the bays, and the paper screens dipped in oil for the better sheltering of such as worked in colours.

'It is a strange thing to my mind, my Lord Abbot,' he said, as they turned down the west cloister, 'to find French spoken so constantly in this monastery, and never a word of Latin.'

'It should remind my friend of old days,' said the Abbot pleasantly, referring to the Archbishop's early life in Paris.

'In sooth, but I was wondering why it did not, my lord; and now I think on it, perhaps the accent is a little different.'

The Abbot winced. There was nothing the monks of Westminster prided themselves on more than on their pure French—so superior to the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe! But if there was one thing in special which marked Simon of Sudbury above

all other prelates, it was the art of saying the right thing at the wrong time. Indeed, this was a very perilous gift to him. However, the Abbot was far too courteous to let it be seen that the bolt had been driven home; he suggested that they should walk round the precincts before supper, as there was time enough.

As they approached the north cloister the Abbot said :

‘I hope my renovation of the west and north cloister approves itself to thy taste in architecture. But I must not let thee think that all this building is due to me ; no, my predecessor, Simon Langham, left an enormous legacy from which I have been able to renew the Abbot’s lodge and the cloisters.’

‘So I have heard, Lord Abbot ; but to thy energy and taste, no less than to the late Archbishop’s beneficence, we owe much, very much. And now, will you forgive me for mentioning a little thing which has been troubling me?’

‘Not any defect in our designs, I trust,’ said the Abbot quickly.

‘No—oh no ! a purely private matter of mine own. Two of my squires have not returned to my palace at Lambeth. They went yesterday to the City to see the pageants, and . . .’

‘I see ! Very vexatious of them ! Haunting with taverners perchance ! But hast thou marked the depth of that rose yonder?’

‘Exceeding quaint, i’ faith ! I should not mind so much if I knew where they were. If any ill hath befallen them . . .’

‘Rest easy! thy birds will fly home when they are hungry. Now, shall I go on letting the monks be buried in the central garth* there, or shall I allow interments under the cloister stones?’

‘The garth doth not seem yet over-full, my lord. What can have detained those youths—one of whom is most constant of purpose—it passeth my poor wit to conceive.’

‘Rest you merry, my Lord Archbishop; as the vulgar say, “They have more tow on their distaff” than your holiness recks of; when that is unravelled they will come back. If thou hadst the annoyances to bear that I have: what with draw-latches and reavers† in the King’s Road, and outlaws haunting in the morass yonder, west of the mill-ditch, and flying of strange falcons in the Tothill Heath, I am all fore-spent. By the way! The Commons, when they meet in the chapter-house there, do much harm; there be some that waste and destroy the frescoes, nay, deface seraphs and angels in very wantonness.’

‘Alas! my lord; and thou dost really think . . .’

‘Excuse me one moment. I see one of the brethren yonder who should be at work in the chapel of the infirmary. I must have speech with him. Pray stroll onward and visit our gardens; I will rejoin thee.’

So saying, the Abbot bustled away to St. Catharine’s Chapel, muttering to himself, ‘Peste soit le prêtre! he can talk of nought but his two scurvy squires.’

The Archbishop also frowned as he entered the garden, and said aloud to himself: ‘Was there ever a man so wrapped up in his own bricks!’ However,

* Grass-plot.

† Burglars and thieves.

the pleasaunce, with its shaven lawns and cool alleys, distracted the prelate's thoughts ; the sequestered sanctity of the spot was grateful to his shattered nerves. He strolled on, listening now to the song of the little birds and now to the chime of the Abbey bells. Soon he caught sight of two of the brethren lying at the further end of a pleached alley.

'I will make up to them unawares,' he muttered. 'Poor old men ! they will be pleased to hear me talk with them, no doubt.'

So he took a devious route through some shrubs, and was approaching them laterally, when his ears were assailed by sounds which seemed very unbecoming a monk. Could it be so ? Yes, there was no doubt. One of those wicked old men was trolling out in a full and mellow voice a very secular ditty. The Archbishop stood still to listen ; his ears tingled ; the very birds seemed to suspend their vesper song as the untoward notes ascended.

"Vive la belle !" they cry, *fragantia vina bibentes*,
They drink till they be dry, *linguâ sensuque carentes* ;
They shout, "Fill up the bowls ! *bonus est liquor, hic maneamus !*
For all good Christian souls, *dum durant vasa, bibamus.*"

With hasty strides the Archbishop surprised the unsuspecting brethren, who were lying at full length, face downwards, on the grass.

'How now ! how now ! what ribaldry is this to be chaunting and carolling in the infirmary gardens !—and ye who wear the honoured garb of the "seven playfellows," who have prayed and wept and fasted and sung in these precincts so many—eh?—what ! my own squires ? Thou, Alured of Dene ! and thou,

John Standish ! Resolve me ! why this mummary—why ?'

The story came out by bits. The Archbishop was at first disposed to be very angry ; then his relief at finding them safe again made him relent. But reflection induced him to essay a moral indignation which he did not feel, and he was proceeding with raised voice and angry accents to expostulate with them on their enormous folly, when the Abbot, seeing the frocks of the seven playfellows and hearing the fierce and bitter denunciation of the Archbishop, ran up with both arms outspread, followed by the chaplain of the infirmary, the leech, and the prior of the cloister, all crying :

' Good my lord, spare the playfellows ! spare the holy old men ! spare the gray hairs ! good my lord.'

' Out and alas !' said the Abbot, all out of breath ; ' wottest thou not that it is our rule never to speak a harsh—a harsh word to those ho—holy men. After their fifty years of profession they claim that privilege. Nay, my Lord Archbishop, in what have they offended ? How have they deserved this—this ungentle treatment ?'

The chaplain, the leech, and the prior stood respectfully apart, all showing in their faces a sense of being wronged, grievously wronged and painfully shocked. As for the two luckless squires, the sense of their undignified position had made them turn their backs on the Abbot and his friends, and with bowed heads they were stealing almost imperceptibly towards the mill-stream on the west of the gardens ; but my Lord Abbot ran after them, crying :

‘Stay, my sons! stay and hear our condoling words. The good Archbishop did chide with you, not knowing who ye were . . .’

‘Marry! but I did, Lord Abbot. Give me leave to speak now! They are not in sooth the holy men they seem. They are wanton . . .’

‘Benedicite! that ever this should be said of the beloved seven playfellows.’

‘They are no playfellows, Lord Abbot—look to their brazen brows.’

‘Brazen! and this to my face! Give me leave to tell thee that thou art interfering where thou hast no jurisdiction, Archbishop! By the holy Pope of Rome! this may not be! this may not be! But thou art speaking in ignorance of our most tender rule. We love our aged brethren, our good playfellows, our holy brethren, our . . .’

Alured could contain himself no more, but exploded in a loud burst of laughter, and then bent double, with both his hands pressing on his girdle.

The Abbot stood like one thunderstruck, till Simon of Sudbury took him by the arm and quietly possessed him of the whole story, while the other monks closed in and listened all agape.

‘And, I trow, I have good ground for chiding with them, my Lord Abbot. But above all, I would crave pardon of this convent for thus abusing the sacred boon of sanctuary. Come hither, ye my esquires, and kneel down humbly before my Lord Abbot and his prior, craving (if so be) pardon for this outrecuidance.’*

* Presumption.

Alured Dene and John Standish knelt with lowered heads.

‘That makes all the rebecks in tune again. Rise, my sons; for we, too, are not guiltless of your master’s weakness. We, too, have been known to spare the stick and thereby spoil our children. But if ye go forth unchastised of any, remember that a generous devotion binds you by a link which is stronger than the stoutest chain to offend no more.’

So saying, the Abbot graciously motioned the squires to rise, adding pleasantly:

‘But we must have you unfrocked presently,* lest the scandal spread. We should deliver you back your vows writ on the blessed strips of vellum, signed with the red cross, and tied with silken thread, but that we fear they are mislaid in the chests of the treasury.’

‘It is exceeding gracious of my Lord Abbot to take it so generously,’ said the Archbishop; ‘and I protest that ye twain are bound by a spiritual homage to seek a way of fair requital.’

The two squires, in their serks,† bowed and murmured assent.

The Abbot now led the way back to the western cloister, where all the boys were being schooled under the master of the novices.

‘A wholesome sight,’ said the Abbot, ‘to mark not only the diligence, but the discipline which makes diligence possible.’

But Simon of Sudbury made no reply. He had, indeed, marked the throng of boys rather more care-

* At once.

† Shirts.

fully than his mitred brother; and what had struck him most just then was the singular way in which several of the younger scholars were looking across the garth towards the eastern cloister.

‘What are those boys gazing up at, Standish?’ he asked in a whisper.

Standish advanced towards the bay and looked in the direction indicated, but immediately returned with a face beaming with smiles.

Suppressed titters were audible on many a bench now.

‘Look forth, my lord, towards the windows of the monks’ dormitory.’

The Archbishop looked forth.

The Master of the Novices also looked forth, in no very amiable mood.

But, alike, the Master and the Archbishop could not refrain from laughing at the very ludicrous sight which revealed itself.

At an upper window of the dormitory Dan John of Canterbury, the giant, was leaning forth by almost half his length. In his hand he held a clout, or towel, which he was feigning to swallow, and then dexterously recovering from the back of his head with the other hand.

A genial gentleman! but, considering that he had been sent into privacy for penance, a little out of order in choosing such a time and place for the display of his subtlety as a jongleur.

This he seemed to be quite aware of so soon as he found his spectators included not only the little boys,

but even the Master of the Novices, the Archbishop, the Priors, and my Lord Abbot.

Howbeit, we may not always shake off the consequences of our peccadilloes so promptly as we could wish.

The poor giant had, in his devotion to his art, wedged himself so firmly in the window that he could on no account wriggle back. He struggled and twisted his long back, but he struggled in vain; until at last, when there broke forth a great shout of merriment from every throat at the grotesque appearance, the Abbot cried :

‘Stay where thou art thrust, my son; I shall order the architect to take note of the conceit*—a goodly gargyle for our new lodge.’

Then the giant’s face grew wondrous quaint with puckering smiles, and, like the laughter-smith he was, he spread his hands abroad, made a sign as if he would dismiss them, and cried :

‘Ye can all go your ways. I give you my blessing: the scholars shall to play, the rest to supper. As for me, that caitiff monk who chiselled my ribs hath left one bone too large. I shall, therefore, beg the convent in future to be good enough to hand up my victuals and suppet-brewis, my . . . Oh! I forgot—I am under penance of silence.’

And Dan John opened his mouth so wide that again the laughter echoed through the cloisters, and the rooks flew affrighted, and perchance scandalized, to the windy lantern of the great tower.

* Idea.

CHAPTER XI.

THE skylia, or little bell of the Abbot, began to ring, and the two esquires hurried off to wait upon their master; while Willie Langland went to the Miséricord, or smaller dining-room, for he was to stay in the monastery until curfew rang, and meet his father, who had been engaged to come and sing during the Abbot's meal. And now the other guests had assembled in the Abbot's withdrawing-room, known as the Jerusalem Chamber, from the subjects woven on the tapestry.

First, after the Archbishop, was the Abbot of St. Albans, Thomas de la Mare, the premier abbot in England, and president of the General Chapter of the Benedictines. He was a fine old man, tall and handsome, in spite of his seventy-two years, and not without the gift of wit and eloquence. He had been much beloved both by King Edward III. and by the Black Prince.

Close to the Abbot, and attending with the carefulness of a nurse and the keenness of an author to his master's every step, look and word, stood Thomas of Walsingham, a young monk of St. Albans, but even thus early distinguished by holding the position of scriptorarius, or principal scribe in the scriptorium

of his convent. He had come but recently from Oxford, where he had taken a part in defending the old learning and the old faith from the attacks of Wyclif, who seemed to him a full dangerous teacher. St. Albans was glad to find in a young monk of such high promise a mind stubbornly bent on maintaining the old ways.

Talking with a very self-sufficient air to Archbishop Simon was a Bishop, whose dark face showed, in flashing eye and compressed lip, at once the hauteur of a noble and the determination of a man of action. This was Courtney, Bishop of London.

Not far from him were Sir John Philpot, the merchant who had driven the Scotch privateers away at his own cost, and Sir Robert of Hales, the King's treasurer and Prior of the Knights Hospitallers, with a few officials of the monastery. The Abbot was talking with Sir Robert de Tressilian, the judge of the King's Bench, and with Master Geoffrey Chaucer, the poet, when the steward, with wand in hand, called the guests to supper.

Then in procession they passed to the Abbot's hall,* where the high table at the upper end was spread with such cates as delight the heart of men who fast oft, and seldom have leisure to be idle. At the lower end of the hall came in some novices, who sang the Benedictine grace, then, bowing low, retired from the chamber. The Abbot of Westminster had Simon of Sudbury on his right hand and the Abbot of St. Albans on his left. It soon appeared that the latter was more bent on feeding his mind than his

* Now the hall of the Westminster Queen's Scholars.

body; for he kept bringing back his host from the story of his building to the position of parties in the State, from questions of the culinary* art to social problems of the day; while Master Walsingham's bright eyes exchanged with Master Chaucer's across the table a glance of intelligence—for the two literary men were rather bent on observing the contrasts of character than on understanding either the mysteries of the cook or the subtleties of the statesman.

'It may be that I am growing to my dotage,' said De la Mare; 'but I often think that the Black Death hath been a dividing-line between an age of faith and an age of doubt.'

'Soothly,' brake in Courtney from the other side, 'and not only an age of doubt, but an age of womanish timidity. These followers of Wyclif, these Lollards, should have been long ago put down.'

'There was the Princess Joanna in favour of them,' said Sudbury.

'Yea—and give me leave to speak it, my Lord Archbishop,' rejoined Courtney, 'there was at least one Archbishop who wished well to that arch-heretic.'

'Wyclif was once a friend of mine—a personal friend. I am not ashamed to own it. I presume the imputation of favouring Wyclif goeth no further.'

This was growing too warm. Abbot Littleington courteously led his guests back into shallower and cooler waters.

* Kitchen.

‘You were talking of the times before the Black Death, my Lord Abbot.’

‘Yea: this land was in better case fifty years ago. Take the facts of population in the first place. In the year 1340 there were five millions in England; in 1370 there were only two and a half millions. Think how we are impoverished in Church, State and society by this awful visitation of God! I remember the time when almost every parish had its own priest; now they are far to seek. Our monks, too, are of a lower status than those we had; learning consequently decays. Doth not thy opinion lead to that point, Master Precentor?’

Thomas of Walsingham, precentor and scribe, bowed assent.

‘Then the friaries—how sadly have they fallen off! Where are the self-devoted young nobles who sought privation and death while they served our Lord’s poor and sick by the fever-stricken cabins of the town-ditch? Benedicite! where indeed? The foul death hath reft them all away, and instead we have wolvisch stomachs hunting in couples, absolving full lightly for money, caring nought for the grace of God, but all for their own bravery of dress—furs and silks and piked shoon—and viands that shall savour well.’

‘What saith Master Chaucer?’ asked the Abbot of Westminster of the poet, who till now had eaten with eyes cast down, but had just whispered something to his neighbour.

‘I was but quoting an old rhyme, that saith of these same friars—

“ Meatless, so meagre are they made,
And penance so pulleth them down,
That each one is an horsè-lade,
When he shall truss of town.” *

The company laughed at the satire, for there were no friars there to spoil the unanimity of feeling. Abbot de la Mare went on :

‘ When I was Prior of Tynemouth, it was almost laughable to see how scared the Scotch were of our plague. They had a regular form of prayer against it, as thus. One said, “ Benedicite !” another replied, “ Dominus !” to which the first made answer, “ God and St. Mango and St. Andrew shield us this day by God’s grace from the foul death that Englishmen die upon !” But in good sooth, sirs, they that have seen the foul pest stalk through a monastery, or a city, or a court—for he spareth none—and heard the wretch in extremis, barking like a wolf—ugh !’

The sudden silence of the Abbot, his expressive gesture and solemn tone, sent a shiver through the company.

The server, who stood by the Abbot to carve the choicest morsels, made bold to invite the guests blithely to his toothsome fare.

‘ My Lord Abbot of St. Albans lets our guests from their supper. Come ! who will eat a fair slice of swan dipped in liver sauce ? Who is for a morsel of lamb with ginger sauce ? Goose and garlic ? There is to be a course of curlews brewed in sugar, salt and cinnamon. Come ! eat while ye may of my Lord Abbot’s hospitality.’

* Leave town.

‘Yea, think not, my friends, that we monks live thus luxuriously every day. I dare to say that Master Chaucer, of his wantonness, remembereth a rhyme against even us of the religion; though he be so silent, yet hath he a quaint wit. No need for such a one to vaunt forth his Attic salt.* He is not one that hunteth the hare with a tabor.’

‘Who is this Master Chaucer whom my Lord Abbot thus extols?’ was the grudging remark of Sir Robert Tressilian.

Sir John Philpot replied :

‘A right merry gentleman, known of many in the City of London, where he is Comptroller of the Customs. Thou wouldst not think that those same elvish features, that shy smile, betokened the face of a maker† of some repute.’

‘No, in good sooth! depend upon it, Sir John, his name shall not outlast his doll-frame, when ours shall be written in the rolls of the great! He be too much made of!’

Master Chaucer began anon to quote from an old poem, how :

‘With hawk and with the boar-hound eke,
With brooch or ouches on his hood,
Some say no mass in all a week;
Of dainty fare is their most food:
Had they been out of religioun, ‡
They must have hanged at the plough,
Threshing and dyking fro’ town to town,
With sorry meat, and not half enow.’

‘Do they sing such ribald songs of us?’ cried the

* Refined wit.

† Poet.

‡ Not been monks.

Abbot of Westminster. 'Ah! the lewd folk do use too free a license of speech, censuring in evil part their betters.'

'Yea,' chimed in the old Abbot of St. Albans, 'ever since the Black Death came among us—I know not how it is—all the mirth seemeth to have ceased out of the land. The folk that were of late so blithe and gladsome are now all bent on moral problems, and some do even read on the Bible in the English tongue, notwithstanding that Parliament hath enacted that such shall have no benefit of sanctuary. But for such lewd folk to presume to question on matters of morals is indeed a scandal.'

'Thou mayst say so,' said Bishop Courtney; 'but this is the work of those vagrant Lollards of John Wyclif, who do overrun the land; for of every five men that shall be talking together, three shall be Lollards. Howbeit, I have already taken order with certain of them. There was one that miscalled the Blessed Virgin "the Witch of Lincoln," and others that threw down an image from a church and dragged it in the mire. These have been shrewdly chastised.'

As the meats were being removed, and the boards were being newly spread with 'subtleties' in jelly, cake and pastry—such as a representation of spring, with flowering trees and kids running from the mountains; or an embattled keep seated upon a hill, round which knight and pikeman were holding strong leaguer—the minstrels advanced into the centre of the hall and sang some merry ditties.

'Who is yon dark-faced clerk who chaunteth the burdoun?'

* Bass.

‘That, Sir Robert, is a man of some note—one William Langland.’

‘What! the pestilent fellow that maketh alliterative verse for every churl to troll as he goeth to mass or plough?’

‘The same. But methinks thou dost him wrong, Sir Robert,’ replied Sir John Philpot; ‘for he is no Lollard, but one who would cleanse and purify the old institutions by righteous satire.’

‘I trust I may have the hanging of him!’ answered the judge; ‘it is full perilous work teaching the thief how rotten is the door that keeps the treasure. That man’s lines shall breed a revolt.’

‘A revolt?’ cried the Abbot of Westminster; ‘not in our time, I ween. Though my Lord of St. Albans hath seen strange doings in his day—hast not?’

‘Ah! that was long before the Black Death, when folk were—were . . .’

‘Merry and blithesome,’ brake in Master Chaucer, a mischievous twinkle beaming in his gray eyes.

‘Grant me grace, by thy leave!’ said the Abbot, a little querulously. ‘I was a young man then—it must have been in 1327—when the town of St. Edmund’s Bury rose up against the convent, brake into the choir of the abbey-church, and carried off all—chalice and patten, tunicle and altar frontal, crucifix and reliquary, crosier and gloves—’twas piteous to see precious things flung about as though they had been fardel-cheap. Books were stolen worth ten thousand pounds, for their jewelled covers and rare illuminations. The convent deeds were reft

away, and the poor Abbot was forced to execute a grant of freedom from debt for all who owed moneys.'

'But, my lord,' said the Archbishop, 'thou didst begin by praising the old time and the old folk. How, then, cometh it that our commons are so much more buxom* and obedient than they were before the pest?'

'How? how? Why! to be sure! because the foul death hath quelled all the manhood out of this land.'

'Yea,' said Chaucer, softly smiling at Walsingham, 'I begin to agree with my Lord Abbot there; for, do not the leeches† say that children breed fewer teeth since the great pest?'

'Well, gramercy!' said the Abbot of Westminster; 'at least, we live abbots are allowed to rule in peace. No riots disfigure this age.'

'No, my lord,' replied the older man; 'but there are ominous signs abroad which no wise statesman should neglect. I speak to my Lord the Chancellor here, and ask him to consider the temper of the labourers when he would heap tax upon tax, and toll upon toll.'

Archbishop Simon laughed, and replied:

'I should vastly like to consider both the temper and the needy straits of the poor; and this I propose to do by taxing the regular clergy, and all monks and friars. To think that 20,000 of the richest of us go untaxed is . . .'

'How now? Thine own monks of Canterbury are the most luxurious!'

* Yielding.

† Physicians.

‘Pardon me, my Lord of Westminster; I do not answer for the monks. I merely wish to get the money needed for the King and Parliament in the justest way.’

‘It is but fair,’ said Sir John Philpot; ‘though I must say that I think this land was never quieter at home than it is now. The ominous signs of revolt are only to be seen by the eye of eld.’*

‘Quite so! quite so!’ exclaimed Abbot Littlington, and the rest of the company were just indulging in a little sceptical laugh, which was nettling poor Abbot de la Mare, when a terrific crash overhead seemed to herald the downfall of the Abbey, and, indeed, to be the crack of doom! The doors flung open at the buttery end of the hall, and a hot wind swept up to the daïs, quenching the candles which had just been lighted, and leaving the guests silent, dismayed, astounded. Some sprang to their feet; some crossed themselves devoutly. There was not one who did not feel that some sign from heaven had rebuked them for their assurance.

When Abbot Littlington had recovered himself, he called aloud:

‘Lights! lights! Ah! but ’twas a thunder-clap, indeed! Come, my friends, let us repair to the Jerusalem Chamber, where we shall be nearer the church. What a storm!’

But the wind blew and the rain fell; the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled. In that imperious voice of wrath none dare do aught but whisper, clasp hands, and haply tell his beads. It was only

* Old age.

a thunderstorm to them that evening. But long after, when they recited to younger men the awful events that were soon to follow, they recalled to mind that weird thunder-clap, and knew that while they had smiled contemptuously at the forces of revolt, God had spoken to them in His might. Then would they kiss cor-saint,* or call devoutly on 'Christ and His dear Moder.'

* Holy relic.

CHAPTER XII.

A FEW days after the dinner at Abbot Littlington's lodge, the Princess of Wales was riding in the pleasure near Eltham Palace, towards the close of June. It was a cool, breezy day, and the ladies had pushed their horses into a gallop, and were now walking them slowly by a bubbling stream shaded by tall trees, when a horseman galloped up and saluted.

'The Archbishop's livery!' murmured Sibyl to her friend.

John Standish, for it was he, had reined in his panting horse suddenly, and remained bowing deeply to the Princess, while his spirited charger backed, as he caracoled under the spur with arched neck and flowing mane, as though doing obeisance, like his rider, to the royal lady.

'Speak, Sir Squire,' said Princess Joanna of Kent; 'what is thy need?'

'The Archbishop seeketh his Grace the King, and hath sent me hither to find him.'

'The King shall have returned by this time through the other park. So, I pray thee, save thy good horse further galloping and ride with us back to the palace.' Then, calling Sibyl to her side, the Princess whispered: 'Is not this the young squire who professeth himself so devoted to thy service?'

‘The same, dear lady. Were it mutual, the music would go better.’

Then the Princess rode on with Standish, now apparelled in all the bravery of red say, or silk, and jagged and coloured sleeves, which fashion allowed, and until the cavalcade reached the embattled gateway which commanded the northern bridge over the moat, she held the squire in close and earnest conversation.

In her bower, no sooner was she divested of her riding-apparel than she sent for Sibyl, and said :

‘I much approve of the young gallant, my child. I find him earnest and honest in thought and purpose. We have touched on life and death, on duty, love, and religion : in all hath he answered not only discreetly and warily, but as one that felt the responsibility of knighthood and the love of God.’

Sibyl played with her long sleeve and turned the contents of her aulmonière* on to the floor, as by accident, that her mistress might not see the chagrin that darkened her face.

‘I find, too, that he hath divers times hearkened unto the preaching of Master Wyclif and of Master Nicholas de Hereford ; and, while he is no heretic, yet hath he won somewhat of that strange mystic yearning after a close communion with Heaven which I have ever found most characteristic of this new school of priests.’

Sibyl curtsied, saying :

‘Madame, I doubt not Master Standish is all as grave and sad as he is painted.’

* Long sleeve pocket.

The Princess leaned her cheek upon her hand and sighed. Poor lady! she had drunk in her lifetime a cup strangely mingled of sorrow and triumph, happiness and disappointment. When she was but seven years old, her father, Edmund of Kent, had been beheaded for having attempted to raise a party in favour of his brother, Edward the Second. As she grew up into girlhood, her cousin, Edward the Black Prince, yielding to the charms of that fascinating beauty which had already gained amongst the people the title of 'Fair Maid of Kent,' paid his court to her, and would have wedded her had not the King and the Church withstood him.

Then, though her love had been given elsewhere, this beautiful young girl was married to Sir Thomas de Holland, and at his death to the Earl of Salisbury. But when he, too, died, the Black Prince, who had never forgotten his first love, came forward and claimed her hand. He was now England's darling hero, and there was none strong enough to say him nay.

But the cup of happiness was destined to be dashed from her lips after a few years. One son, Richard, the Prince left behind him as a pledge of love before he fell a victim to the wasting sickness. The grief, the anxiety, of the widow and mother drew Joanna's thoughts away from the vanities of earth, and thus it was that now, in her sixty-first year, she yearned more for the seclusion of the cloister than for the frivolous pleasures of the court.

Fixing her large, lustrous eyes upon the face of her maid of honour, she sighed deeply as she said :

‘Sibyl, God knows, I would not counsel any maid to wed where she could not love ; but, nathless,* my rede† should be to such as thou, “Choose worthily, choose the best, choose as in the sight of God’s holy angels ; for an ill marriage doth mar a noble life.” Now go, speak kindly to this young squire, and be not over-hasty to flout him with words of scorn.’

Sibyl kissed the hand of her mistress and retired.

Meanwhile Standish had rejoined the rest of the Archbishop’s suite in the guard-room, and Alured of Dene took him aside to an embrasure, where the window, deep set in the massive walls, held two small seats privily guarded from prying eyes.

‘Well? What cheer, John? Hast had speech with her?’

‘I have seen her ; but I could frame no sentence, Alured : her beauty so ravished away all my power of speech.’

‘Did she look kindly on thee?’

‘Yea—and nay. Somewhat proud and digne ;‡ but ’tis like I may have misread her looks ; for my heart fluttered like a silly pigeon beneath a tiercel-gentle.§’

‘What ! didst ride all through the park dumb as any stone?’

‘Not so ; the Princess did question with me largely on—on various matters. But the lady Sibyl rode close at hand, and I felt that in delivering myself to the Princess I was revealing my true self to that

* Still.

† Advice.

‡ Disdainful.

§ Male falcon.

gracious and winsome maid of honour—my heart's queen.'

As they thus talked a little page came into the guard-room and beckoned Alured forth.

'Follow me, Sir Squire,' was all he said.

They went through several corridors, and at last stopped by a doorway which was closed only by a curtain. The sound of women's voices came merrily to Alured's ears.

On entering he found himself in the presence of five or six of the maids of honour, and before he had done bowing in some confusion, and with a colour reddening his blonde complexion, the lady Sibyl de Feschamp had touched his arm.

'May I have a word with thee, Sir Squire?'

She took him into a little closet at the further end of the room, drew the tapestry across the entrance, and began :

'So, thou hast brought thy friend to press his own suit?'

'He raves of thee still, sweet lady ; but it is to me he sings thy praises.'

Both laughed ; then Sibyl said coquettishly :

'How fares it with the City wench ? Is her beauty yet blown like the red rose in autumn?'

Alured much disliked such words spoken about Carlotta, whom he thought he loved, and was sure he honoured, for her worthiness and the mental superiority which he could not but acknowledge.

'Oh, I crave pardon !' went on Sibyl, seeing in his face the look of annoyance ; 'I thought the boyish freak was played out by this time, but I see the un-

worthy passion for one beneath thee still haunts about thy heart. I pray thee send Master Standish into my presence presently ;* he, at least, doth not feign to love.'

Sibyl's eyes darted so tender a glance of reproach that the poor fool came fluttering round her like a moth round a candle.

'Oh, lady Sibyl, had I seen thee first !'

'Go, cruel wretch—go ! Wouldst kill me by this slow torture ?'

She put out her beautiful hand ; he seized it and pressed it to his lips, saying to himself all the time :

'Poor Carlotta ! I cannot help it—indeed I cannot !'

She let him indulge his lips with the dainty fingers but a few minutes, and then, drawing her hand away, began to chide with him in low accents, trembling with tender reproaches.

'I cannot permit these freedoms, for in sooth thou lovest me not, neither me nor the poor City maid, whom thou art beguiling by the witchery of thy sweet false face. Nay, protest not thy love, for I will ha' none of it—'tis "come hider love to me" one day, as the English folk say, and the next 'tis "my lief is faren on londe."† 'Tis a shame so to abuse us weak women.'

Sibyl's tears melted the last element of resistance in Alured's heart ; the vision of Carlotta was completely blotted out. He drew the girl closely to his bosom, and stooping, kissed her lips again and again ; but as the two lovers stood locked in this close

* Immediately.

† My love has gone abroad.

embrace the tapestry was quietly lifted, and a page ushered John Standish into the closet.

The poor squire stood for a second or two with parted lips, thunderstruck, utterly dejected, unable to speak or move. Alured could not see his friend, for he had his back to the opening of the tapestry, and he was beginning to vary the entertainment by some foolish phrases of lip-courtesy, when he felt his shoulder roughly grasped. Turning, he gasped out :

‘How now! What! Standish!’

‘Yea, marry! my good friend—God save the mark! Lady, I may not blame thee, if thou preferrest this fond stripling to a rougher soldier. But with him I must reckon on another day, for as foul an act of treachery as ever . . .’

‘Unsay that, or I . . .’

Standish calmly folded his arms across his brawny breast, and with a smile of disdain inquired :

‘Or thou wilt do what? Cry for thy grandam?’

‘Gentlemen, I pray you! fall not out a-brawling within the precincts of the court. Ye know ’tis the loss of a limb to draw sword within the palace! Mary! Editha! help!’ The other girls came running in at the cry, and the little closet was soon crowded with fluttering creatures—all clamouring for peace and quietness.

As soon as Sibyl could make herself heard she implored Alured to leave the chamber, and as he went, she followed him to the outer door, saying :

‘Farewell, cruel one! Oh, how I tremble lest this contretemps should end in some dreadful deed!

There was jealous envy lurking in his eyes, dearest. But I will try and soothe the monster. Now go !'

Alured went down to the guard-room, feeling very foolish. He had lost his best friend ; he had been false to Carlotta, false to Standish, false to his own best resolves ; and he was not quite easy about the physical consequences to his own person, for he was no match for his more stalwart rival. So, though he whistled jauntily as he strode across the base-court, it was but the ghost of a whistle, thin and joyless.

'Leave us awhile, dear friends,' said Sibyl to her young companions, 'for I would have speech with this gentle squire.'

'I marvel, lady, that thou shouldst care to waste thy breath on me, after what I have too unwillingly witnessed but now.'

'I trust thou dost not censure me ill, for in sooth he took me by surprise, as it were ; clasping me round the waist with so fierce a passion that I might not tear myself free.'

'Bencite ! I saw not thy desperate struggles to get free.'

The tone of sarcasm disconcerted Sibyl not a little. She could do nothing but fix her beautiful eyes, snake-like, on Standish until he blushed like a girl.

'Wilt not pardon me ?' she murmured, in so piteous a tone that the anger in his heart thawed quite away.

'I can pardon thee sooner than him, lady Sibyl. I had given him my trust. He was to have—have . . .'

Sibyl's eyes glistened with delight as she heard the broad-shouldered squire stammering over his fond avowal.

'Yea, Sir Squire ; I know what thou wouldst say—that thou didst give him a mandate to make court to me by proxy.'

'I—I was something afraid of thy—thy . . . It is not like handling a lance, thou seest, or giving a back-fall.'

'No,' laughed Sibyl ; 'though thy trusty friend almost gave thee a back-fall. Dost know ? This is not the first time he hath ventured to address me with words of love ; and—and . . .' Here a new idea seemed to cross Sibyl's mind, for she grew distracted and absent for a few seconds, and then went on :

'Thou wilt perchance think me cruel to play with him ; but I resolved to let him have line—the foolish fish that he was—and then, when he was well on my hook, send for thee to pull him forth—as thou didst just now.'

Standish stood, doubting the words he had heard. Had she not begun by asserting that she had tried to tear herself free ?

Sibyl called one of her companions :

'Mary, tell this noble squire the truth. How came he to be brought hither just at the prick of time ? Speak it out, how I bade thee do.'

'Certes, an it please thee so soon to unravel a good mystery. I was bid fetch the young gentleman so soon as I heard thee cough.'

'There now !' exclaimed Sibyl with a ringing laugh.

‘Was it not a good jest to play the malapert? Say now!’

‘It shall prove no jest to him,’ said Standish grimly.

‘Nay, by my fay!* harm him not; for he meant only to take toll on my ventures—and for him I care not a jot.’

‘I thank thee, lady,’ said Standish with some embarrassment. ‘I had feared he had stolen away thy affections.’

‘There is still something left for him who dares to storm the ballium,† she replied, putting her hand under her swelling breast, and looking aside at Standish so coyly that his honest heart fluttered with mingled hope and fear. ‘But what most concerns me,’ she went on, ‘is the cruel way in which he is abusing a girl in the City to whom he professes his love. To hear him ridicule her here is sad indeed!’

‘Poor Carlotta!’ murmured Standish, half to himself.

‘Yea; Carlotta—Carlotta—I forget her to-name.’‡

‘Langland; Will Langland, of Cornhill, is her father—a clerk, scribe, maker of verse, burden-singer, haunter of funerals.’

‘Is it possible he can have stooped so low?’

‘Howbeit, the man is vastly had in honour by certain of the clergy and men of note for his originality of character; and his daughter is well favoured enough for the matter of that.’

‘Isshe beautiful? more attractive than—than . . .?’

* Faith. † Inner fortress. ‡ Surname.

‘Than thou, sweet lady? No! not to be compared in one day! She is darksome and sad and full of thought.’

‘I see; and I am fair and merry, and made up of quips and wreathed smiles, and—foolish levities.’

‘Aman would not have his bride always wise and learned.’

‘No; so should he be schooled instead of being cherished.’

‘A man loves to be cherished when he hath put off his armour,’ said Standish, with such blundering simplicity that the girls, who were listening on the other side of the tapestry, had much ado not to reveal their presence by peals of laughter.

‘But thou wouldst not have this dark thing cruelly wronged?’

‘By St. Peter! no! I would do what a man can to save her that.’

‘Then be my trusty squire! Go to her—not as from me—and show her all the villainous treachery of this same leman* of hers; prove to her how she is foully deceived; tell her, an thou wilt, what thou hast seen this very day.’

‘I shall,’ said Standish in a low, deep voice; and in his dark brown eyes Sibyl saw a fire of moral indignation blazing, which she had so lightly kindled for her own ends.

When, with kissing of her hand, he had quitted the room, the other girls pressed round Sibyl, with much laughter asking and answering of questions.

I wis I have done a pretty piece of business to-

* Lover.

day,' said Sibyl ; ' and if the minx Carlotta be not put out of countenance by this grave man's plain tale, then I will give up toying with men's hearts and take to embroidery.'

But Standish went away from the presence of this siren with a fond and foolish hope, and with his chivalry a little damaged. One scowl he gave Alured as they rode under the palace barbican, and then nursed in a halcyon stillness the pleasant thoughts that came flitting across his mind, like the young kingfishers skimming the translucent wave.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DAY or two after Standish had discovered his friend's treachery, Will Langland and his daughter Carlotta were engaged on a painful business in the little upper room in Cornhill.

Debts were beginning to grow troublesome; the satiric poem had taken more favourably amongst the franklins and guilds, the tilers and labourers and Lollards, than with the great and rich. Then there had been few grand funerals lately, and Langland's fees had been falling off: something evidently must be sold. As Dame Langland clattered and bustled and dusted and washed in the spence* below, Carlotta was kneeling down by the oak bookcase, taking down book after book, while her father sat by the window, making entries on a slip of paper.

Both father and daughter wore a grave look on their faces, but Carlotta sighed deeply from time to time, and regarded her father with an expression of pity, which lent an added beauty to the curving lines of her mouth and the deep violet of her mournful eyes. The afternoon was hot and sultry, and as she was dressed in a summer robe, cut square, her stately neck and white shoulders gleamed like Carrara

* Pantry.

marble in the dusk and gloom of the low-browed chamber.

‘Put them on the floor when I say “for sale,” but replace them carefully, Calote, if I say “keep.” Dost heed me?’

‘Yea, dear father. No need to ask about the top row of books—Bible, Psalter, Breviary, parchments, manuscripts, bills, tallies—can we not sell the bills, father?’

Langland’s long face, stern and rugged and gloomy, was lit up by a momentary smile at his daughter’s attempt at pleasantry, but he said nothing, though the corners of his mouth twitched.

‘Second row, father—Dionysius?’

‘Humph!—no. Poor Dionysius!—keep him, Calote.’

‘Boethius, “De Consolatione Philosophiæ”?’

‘What! old Boethius! Why, I brought him from Malvern. The monks gave him to me as a prize for diligence when I was a boy.’

‘Then he must go back, I suppose. “St. Ambrose”?’

‘A father of the Church. God forbid we should cast him out!’

‘The “Legenda Aurea”?’

‘I think not. Thy mother loves to hear me read out of that.’

‘Huon—his “Tournament of Antichrist”?’

‘A very inspiring work. ’Twould be ungrateful to thrust him forth.’

‘Grossetête’s “Castel d’Amour”?’

‘A religious allegory—to which I am much in-

debted; and to speak sooth, the Lincoln Bishop was as keen a reformer as I am myself. I would as soon sell my own . . .'

'Daughter, thou wouldst say, father,' said Carlotta, with a mellow laugh that brought out the sweet middle notes of her rich contralto voice. 'The next book—let me see!—is "Handlyng Synne."'

'Ha! sweet Calote, for thy sake I shall not sell dear old Robert Manning of Bourne. Why, thou art perusing of him divers times in each week! I would liefer drink with the duck* till my life's end than be forced to part with quaint old Manning. We may all learn good counsel from that same monk. What saith he?

"In God's service are such men irk,[†]
When they come in to chapel or kirk,
To hear the matins or sweet mass-song,
They think it lasteth over-long;
Then shall he jangle or tell a tale,
Or ask where they shall have the best ale."

No; we may not put a slight on so frank a friend. Now count, Calote: how many books have we put by for sale?

'Why! Heaven save thee!—not one! not one!'

Their eyes met, at first with mutual dismay; but soon the absurdity of the situation grew upon them, and they laughed long and loud, so that Dame Langland came running up.

'Sonties! Lottie, why art thou sitting in the

* Rather drink water.

† Bored.

straw with thy best samite frock on, that Master John of Northampton's daughter gave thee? Get up, fond wench! what art a-doing?'

They both told her the tale together, but it came to her ears like a catch sung out of tune, and she saw nothing of mirth in either the recital or the facts.

'The bills are overdue, Will; there is more than one pressing for payment, and there are fines which the Archdeacon's summoner insists on our paying.'

'What! that ill-favoured caitiff who was so unmannerly when we entertained guests on St. John's Eve?'

'Hush, fond child! be not so cursed* with thy tongue; for he is even now despatching of a dish of lampreys and onions on which I have quieted him withal.'

'What, Kit!' said Langland angrily, 'have I not bid thee avoid the scurvy knave? And thou feedest him, forsooth!'

'Yea, him and a friar—a preaching friar—who hunts with him; and give me leave to tell ye both that an it were not for my lip-salve yonder, we should ha' been turned out of house and home long ago. Sell those books, Will—parlous stuff—burn all those writings anent the ploughman's vision, and we may yet live.'

'I trow those guests of thine have counselled thee thus, Kit?'

'Well, and what if they have? It is sound rede.† And hark in thine ear, Will—Master Summoner is

* Crabbed.

† Advice.

sweet on our Lottie. He will make all right for us if we will consent to the match.'

'Tush! breathe it not to the child; 'twill go nigh to break her heart. It is not to be thought on. Pah! the foul fiend quell his overweening temper! The unsavoury summoner indeed!'

Poor Carlotta had overheard enough to guess her mother's meaning, and she sank down on her knees before the dame, kissing her hands and imploring her to have pity and ruth.

Dame Langland tried to be angry, but she ended by weeping; her daughter's anguish had melted all the worldly cares from her soul and left only the simple mother's heart.

'Alack! alack!' she cried aloud. 'I weened he was no fit mate for my little throstle—my singing-birdie.'

'Good-den to you!'

A gruff, strident voice came from below. Soon a bloated face appeared, and the summoner stood grinning and leering on his hosts.

'We want not thy company, man,' said Langland.

'Oh! French courtesy! I suppose I am hote to truss.'*

'As soon as thou canst with all convenience.'

'So break I my chin! Thou shalt suffer for this, Master Langland!'

'Heed him not, good Master Summoner; he is beside himself with much studying. Heed him not! thou shalt have thy desire.'

* Bid to pack and be off.

'Come! that is fairly said, dame. Here, pretty minnikin, give me a kiss or two in token of further acquaintance.'

Carlotta drew herself up, and looked at the summoner with ineffable disdain; but that functionary was not to be put off by girlish whims. He advanced to lay hands on her, when her father somewhat roughly forced him back.

'Dost know what I can do to thee, mad fool?' cried the summoner.

'Aye—send my body to rot in Fleet Prison.'

'And thy wife and daughter, too—to consort with ribald wenches in Cock's Lane. Ruminatè on this bitter end, I prythee.'

The summoner darted an angry look at Langland and left the room.

'There now!' said his dame, wiping her eye with the corner of her apron; 'we are all undone! How untoward! how pitiful! What! with all thy book-learning, Master Langland, hast thou no smattering of human nature to teach thee how to demean thyself to those that can work us ill? Shame on such poor clerklly learning, say I! I knew 'twould be our foredoing when . . .'

Langland could bear no more. Perhaps the sharpened sting had lain in his wife's denial of his having any knowledge of human nature; for there, he thought, he had graduated as a master. Firmly, but gently, he turned her face to the ladder, and quietly accelerated her, still criticizing the higher learning, down the creaking stairs; then he caught Carlotta in his arms, and kissed her, stifling by an

effort the great sob which struggled to escape from his over-burdened heart.

‘Father,’ said the girl, looking up into his face with such angel-sweetness that his agony was redoubled—‘father, let us appeal to the good Archbishop for protection.’

‘A good thought, my child. Simon of Sudbury shall help us for little Willie’s sake. His heart was ever warm, though he do keep a shrewd tongue in his cheek.’

‘But can we sell any of these drawings of mine, father?’

‘We will sell all our books, Calote. All of them, I say. Stay! here come steps again, and there is another voice below.’

Carlotta clasped her hands in delight, for she had recognised the voice of John Standish speaking haughtily to the summoner, and then the reply:

‘Nay, I protest I will have the law of thee for drawing blood from me last time we met in this house—’twas an ill blow on the nose, and shall cost thee forty deniers* before the husting.’

‘I have eighty in my gipsire,† an it please thee to stand up and take another buffet, thou ill-favoured varlet.’

The summoner grumbled and went on with his savoury mess, while Standish mounted the stairs.

‘How now!’ he cried; ‘books are cheap to-day, I ween; for leaves seem to be used in this house like straw in his grace’s.’

‘God shield thee, Master Standish. We were

* Pennies.

† Purse.



LANGLAND WOULD SELL HIS BOOKS.

going to sell some that we did not — some that . . .’

Langland was too proud to tell the truth, and too conscientious to tell a lie.

But Standish stood, looking from the father to the daughter and from the daughter to the father ; and as the real facts presented themselves to his intelligence, his brown eyes were lit by a mirthful gleam, and the dimple in his sunburnt cheek grew deeper and deeper, as he stood strongly poised, looking, as Carlotta thought, like a tower of defence against her enemies.

At length he laughed and said :

‘Who would have thought that chance should have directed my steps hither at the very prick of time? Why! books are the very thing my father bade me buy—books and short-swords.’

‘There, father!’ said Carlotta, holding up her hands beseechingly, as if she feared her father would repent him of his purpose.

‘I doubt we have no books fit for gallants,’ said Langland.

‘St. Peter! my father is of the old school, and would have none but homilies and glosings of Scripture, and such-like. An he come up from Cranbrook Chase and find I have bought me no good books to read on, I am as good as disinherited!’

‘A wise father!’ muttered Langland a little grudgingly; for, now that it was coming to the push, he could scarce force himself to break up his library. But Carlotta beckoned Standish to the bookshelves, and said softly :

'Art thou in good sooth minded to buy any of our books?'

'Yea, mistress, so it please thy father to sell; but a word in thine ear—how much oweth he?'

Carlotta's eyes were full of tears—tears of gratitude; for she perceived that it was out of kindness of heart that he had spoken.

She whispered to him the sum required. Then Standish pulled out of his gipsire two gold florins,* a noble,† a quarter-noble,‡ two groats,§ and a few deniers.||

'Will this serve the turn?'

'More than enough, kind friend. But we cannot . . . we really . . .'

'Say nought of it. I shall tell Alured of Dene he must pay it me again. It is his affair, pretty one, thou wottest well, eh?'

'See, father!' said Carlotta, approaching the table by the oriel window, where Langland sat with his head in his hands, dreamily musing; 'see! all this hath the young man offered for thy books.'

'God yield him for his kind heart! And must they all go, child?'

'Nay, Master Clerk,' brake in Standish cheerily; 'I but want to be able to tell my father that I have purchased a goodly library. I lack not books to read on, seeing that my duties are amongst destriers¶ and knights and coystriels.** But so thou wilt keep these same learned folk ready at call when my father shall be making a journey to London town, it shall suffice.'

* 6s. each. † 6s. 8d. ‡ 1s. 8d. § 4d. each. || Pence.
¶ War-horses. ** Grooms.

‘And are they all to bide with us, good Master Squire?’

‘Aye! but mark me! the moneys are left with thee as a pledge that the books are mine. Dost take me?’*

‘Yea, my boy; I take thee. Seemeth it that I get the better bargain: the coins and the books stay with me. But what hast thou?’

‘The means of crying “quits” with a gluttonous cozener.† I pray you, mark how I shall outface the varlet.’

So saying, Standish, with a face beaming with boyish glee, strode to the staircase and called, ‘Master Summoner!’

‘Anon! anon!’ muttered that official, with his mouth full.

‘Anon! thou naughty knave! I would have thee know that this house is no place for filthy livers like thee. Get thee up and away eftsoons,‡ or I shall make thy nose blush for thee!’

Standish went down the staircase as he spoke.

The summoner, with one cheek bulging, replied angrily:

‘Beware! Thou art interfering with the Arch-deacon’s officer in the lawful discharge of his duty.’

‘What! man! is it thy duty to eat this good housewife’s victuals?’

‘That is beside the mark. I am here to demand certain dues.’

‘And why doth not Master Langland pay thee, and get rid of a knave?’

* Understand.

† Cheat.

‡ At once.

‘For the simple reason that he lacks the means, thou misproud . . .’

‘Ho there! Master Langland, come down and pay this mongrel.’

The summoner laughed a scornful laugh—it was so very likely! But Langland’s tall form was seen slowly descending, and his grave, dark face never moved a muscle as he poured on the table beside the summoner the amount of his debt.

There was a long pause. The friar only looked amused; all the others were too absorbed in their feelings of surprise or relief.

‘Well!’ said Standish; ‘is all told exactly?’

‘Yea, marry! ’tis; and I would know how he came by it?’

‘’Tis not in thy duties. Come, pocket up thy coins and trudge.’

Standish laid a heavy hand on the summoner’s shoulder; but he testily turned half round, crying:

‘A pest on thy insolence! I shall bide till I have done my supper.’

‘I trow not,’ said Standish very quietly, but proceeded to wind up the man’s ear as it had been a mare’s tail.

With a sudden yell the summoner rose from his settle, and was driven by the ear, like a pig, to the door, where he was released, but not without a hearty kick, which shook his whole frame and left an aching reminder for some days.

‘Trudge.’

One word was enough for the friar. He just

glanced once at the firm-set mouth of the squire, and scuttled away with his bag.

‘And whence came all this wealth?’ cried the dame.

‘Thy good-man shall resolve thee;* I go to have a quiet word with your daughter, if ye can trust me.’

Langland and his wife exchanged looks.

‘Did I not tell thee that he was the one for our Carlotta?’ the dame muttered.

Standish found Carlotta sitting in the oriel window. Her hands were folded in her lap, and her dark eyes were turned to the evening sky that gleamed above the low gables facing the house. There was a half-smile upon her mouth, whose parted lips just revealed a glimpse of pearly teeth; her eyes, too, were glad with a brightness of some unlooked-for joy. She seemed to be engaged in prayer, and the prayer seemed to have slid into thanksgiving. For a moment Standish paused, gazing upon her sweet, entranced face, as it were the face of a nun commercing with Heaven; for he dare not break in upon her meditations fancy-sweet. Only he thought within himself:

‘How mean a caitiff is Alured of Dene to deceive one so beautiful—and so good! Alas! that I must spoil the poor thing’s dreams. But ’tis kinder to do it so. And Sibyl—she bade me, as her trusty squire, come hither and show the poor child how she was being foully abused. Ahem! Mistress Langland!’

Carlotta, roused from her reverie thus suddenly, cried:

‘Levè!† how thou hast startled me!’

* Explain to thee.

† Leve=lieber, Dear me!

'I would I could have left thee in thy content, sweet maiden; but life hath clouds as well as sunshine.'

'I wot it hath full well, Master Standish; yet give me leave to thank thee heartily for that thou hast dispersed one cloud.'

'Oh! 'tis nought; to have saved thy father pain, that is guerdon* enough. But thou wert musing on some pleasant theme.'

Carlotta's eyes fell, and a blush came into her cheek, as she replied in gentle accents:

'Thou art his friend—I may confess to thee—I was thinking on Alured, and wondering—wondering if ever . . .'

'Thou lovest him?' asked Standish rather sternly.

The beautiful liquid eyes glanced upwards in surprise:

'Soothly—aye! if a maiden may be so bold. But oh! Holy Mary, dear Mother of the Lord! give me grace to deserve the love of one who stands so far above me, and hath so noble a presence.'

Standish stood awhile mute; a sigh escaped him; it was indeed hard to shatter this poor girl's idol, and leave her heart desolate.

'It would cost thee much to give him up?' The question was asked brusquely, almost savagely; for only so could he force the cruel words.

This time the tears came into her eyes, and the tender rosebud mouth drooped at the corners as she gave him one sad, half-reproachful look.

Standish sank into a chair before her, and covered

* Reward.

his eyes with one hand, while a low groan escaped his lips. He could not bring himself to mar the happiness of this beautiful child.

Carlotta saw the agony, the struggle in his mind, and a sudden fear shot into her heart, and a light leapt from her eyes, as she rose, thinking to herself: 'Alas! what have I done? Doth this man love me, too?' But she had misread his voice and manner.

'I must speak! Sit down!' He stretched forth his hand to hold her; but Carlotta drew herself haughtily up, and said:

'Thou forgettest what is due to the betrothed of thy friend, Sir Squire.'

'Nay; hear me speak—and God knows I say it against my will.'

But she had sailed away, her head gracefully poised on her long neck, her step stately and slow; and Standish had told her nothing.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE armoury in the Archbishop's palace at Lambeth was a busy scene on that same evening on which Standish had visited Langland. There were engaged some of the knights of Simon of Sudbury, bound to do him service by the tenure of knight-service, holding their lands of him on condition that they prayed for his soul and defended him at call. There was to be a 'gaudeamus,' or feast, and an inspection of armour in the great hall; and thus it was that knights and squires were bustling to and fro, armourers were polishing and riveting, pages were learning how to arm the wooden models that were set round by the walls of the great armoury.

Amongst the pages was little Willie Langland, and by him stood Alured of Dene. They were arming a lay figure or model; but the boy looked weary and weak, he moved languidly, and could scarce lift some of the heavier pieces of plate.

'Come your ways, youngster!' said the elder, as he gave the boy a push to quicken his movements; 'thou wilt make a sorry figure before Sir Richard. Do on that armour afresh.'

The boy sighed, and his dark eyes gave one reproachful glance, which was lost upon the self-

complacent squire, who for his part was thinking on the colour of his new doublet, and wondering how he could show it off before the maid of honour. And, indeed, the sight of Willie rather put him out of temper, for it reminded him of Carlotta, and made his still sensitive conscience sting him shrewdly.

‘Take care how thou climbest up with that bascinet, and—mark me!—fasten the cap-mail to the surcoat. Why standest at gaze?’

‘I may not lift the visored-helmet; I be all-to-swinked.’*

‘Tête Saint Gris! thou art swinked indeed! Why, at thy age I could fight at the tourney. Go to for a lazy do-nought!’

A rough push sent the boy staggering, and he would have fallen had not a friendly hand held him up.

John Standish had but just entered the armoury.

‘What need to be so rude with the child? Wouldst thou mar the son’s career as thou hast marred the daughter’s?’

The last words, spoken in a low but significant tone, made the colour come into Alured’s cheek.

‘See! the boy faints. Fetch water—fetch water!’

‘Fetch it thyself, an thou be so tender-hefted about him.’

Standish set the boy gently down, and then, striding towards Alured, dealt him a heavy buffet on the ear.

‘I challenge thee! I challenge thee!’ he gasped, as he tried to recover his footing, well-nigh lost.

* Tired out.

The sound of the blow had echoed through the hall. The pages ran to see what was toward; the armourers stopped their riveting; squires and knights ceased talking, and turned to see what bruit* was forward.

‘Thou challengest me?—à outrance,† me doubteth not?’

There was a sarcasm in the words which made Alured mutter:

‘Aye, to the death, maugre thy boasted strength!’

‘Arm them!—arm the combatants!’ cried the bystanders, and the knights and squires laughed and rubbed their hands in glee.

‘Now shall we see yon proud slittered‡ popinjay punished home,’ said one of the armourers to his mate.

The two squires were led into an inner courtyard, fully armed, and swords, somewhat blunted, were given them; for no one really wished to see the encounter a deadly one.

Then they crossed swords, with much courtesy of saluting and retiring the point, until a knight, who had been named arbiter, cried ‘Allez!’ and the steel clashed out merrily in the quiet ward.

‘The tall one dresses like my lady’s preux chevalier, but he fights like my lord’s potager,’§ said a sarcastic old knight.

‘The stout one shall slice him like an Essex cheese, methinks.’

Willie Langland stood there, half interested, half

* Noise.

† With pointed lance.

‡ In slashed doublet.

§ Cook.

fearing the result, and feeling very much inclined to run and tell the good Archbishop what was toward, were it not a womanly thing to do.

Alured was hacking and hewing with all his might, but John Standish kept his ground and his head, and was content to parry the blows that descended so viciously.

‘Give him a back-hander, John,’ said one of the squires, as they paused to take breath; ‘deal him a shrewd one under the ear.’

‘No, Maurice; let him live to fight for his master. I want not his blood,’ was the rejoinder.

‘What saith he?’ said Alured fiercely. ‘He wots well that with these heavy swords he is master. Let him engage me with a dagger.’

‘No, no!’ cried the knights; ‘twere against all usage of arms.’

‘Ye favour him, my masters. I appeal to the arbiter. Let us be quit of our mail, and give us each a dagger.’

‘As it likes thee,’ said Standish; ‘thou wouldst find a way to my heart with a French passado or an Italian knife: be it so. I, too, will be unarmed, and, with nothing in my hands, I engage to disarm our testy young friend of his cultello, and, an it please you, to carry him off incontinently to bed.’

A roar of laughter greeted this speech.

But Alured’s friends pressed round him and urged him not to accept terms so undignified.

‘I reckon nought of the dignity. He hath uttered a vaunting challenge; let him abide the issue.’

The two men were speedily unarmed, and, clad

only in doublet and hose, they fronted each other warily.

Alured knew well his opponent's skill in wrestling, and did his best to avoid the perilous grip, oftentimes retiring or dodging sideways as Standish, with watchful eye, pressed him back from point to point. At last—a dash—a clutch—the dagger gleamed and fell—the two men parted again.

'He lost his hold! See! he bleeds in the shoulder!'

'Tis cowards' play!' murmured Willie. 'Shall none stop it?'

'Hush, boy! let be! 'Tis prime sport; spoil it not.'

'I shall, though,' muttered the boy, as he ran towards the library. 'Oh dear my lord and father, do come! do come!'

'What coil is this?' said Simon of Sudbury, looking up from his law-book, on which he was studying.

'They are killing poor Standish, your grace's trusty squire.'

'Now, by Paul's bell, bring me to him—quick!'

As the Archbishop and page hastened across the hall and through the corridor, they heard a great shout; as they emerged into the little courtyard, they saw Alured of Dene held high above the head of Standish, as though he were on the point of being dashed to the ground.

'Hold! hold! the Archbishop!' shouted knights and squires.

Standish faced about, still holding the struggling squire by belt and shoulder; his face was red and *smiling*.

‘How now! how now! What rude horse-play is this?’ cried his grace.

There was a sudden hush. The only sound was the call of the jackdaws as they flew from tower to buttress.

Even Alured’s legs ceased their horizontal struggles in mid-air, and John Standish stood as still as a statue.

‘Oh! I see,’ said the Archbishop; ‘only a little foolish carolling.* This boy made me afraid there was more toward.’

‘An it please thee, my father, look to his shoulder.’

The blood was flowing from the wound dealt by Alured, and both shoulder and arm were crimson to the elbow.

‘In the name of pity! come your ways! Put him down, Standish, and seek the leech anon. I command it.’

‘Bear me witness, good friends, that this young man’s life hath been in my power. I could have killed him like a rat, or—carried him off to bed. Now thou art free.’

So saying, he cast him off, as a falconer would cast off an eyas† from his fist; but, unlike the eyas, Alured fell on all-fours upon the ground, while the bystanders roared with laughter to see the sorry figure which he cut.

Standish was carried off to the infirmary, where the leech bound up his shoulder, not without many grave words of advice, many quotations from the Fathers and the Holy Text.

Then order was given that he should repair to the

* Play, with or without song. † A home-bred hawk.

scriptorium, where he found the Archbishop reading at a desk, dressed in a blue-gray robe and hood with empty falling sleeves, through which appeared the blue sleeves of his under-robe.

‘My son, sit down on this stool, for thou must be weak from loss of blood. I have heard somewhat of this feud from my chamberlain, but I would question with thee more. Bethink thee! if wrath and malice are to set my meinë* at variance one against another, I may as well have none to aid me at all. Why, my dear son, thou art the last I should have suspected of giving way to anger. Thou knowest what my whilome friend, Master John Wyclif, hath writ—how they that give way to wrath wax so wode† “they wot not what they doon.”’

‘It is sooth, my father,’ said Standish, looking up trustfully into the thin face of his master, and seeing, through the mask of irritability and nervousness, which repelled those who knew him not, the real kindness of heart which underlay the rough exterior.

‘What is the prime and efficient cause of this bickering, then?’

‘In the first place, good my lord, I had committed a certain charge unto this same squire for to carry out honestly and loyally; but he hath foully mis-sworn and done me grievous wrong.’

‘Aye, aye! but “a certain charge” is all too vague. Of what sort and quality was this same charge?’

‘It was a charge of—of honour, affecting the fortunes of a person of quality.’

‘Quite so; of some person. That will not do for

* Household.

† Mad.

me, Standish. I must know the whole secret. What man was it ?

‘No man, please your grace.’

‘No man ! Surely it was not a woman ?’

Standish stammered and blushed. He found it hard to confess this, his first weakness in that line, to the blunt Archbishop.

‘I have long admired one of the ladies about the good Princess, the Fair Maid of Kent, as men name her.’

‘Tush ! it is mere folly. Leave such toys to boys and fools. I had thought thou wert made of sterner stuff, my son.’

‘I hope it is no sin to love a woman, my lord. A good wife may turn her husband into the path of light. It is written by the same Master Wyclif : “When women be turned fully to goodness, full hard it is that any man pass them in goodness.” But what thinketh my father ?’

‘True enough ; but he goeth on to say, if I remember aright, “And as hard it is that any man pass them in sin when they be turned to pride and lechery and drunkenness.” But come to the point : how and in what way did thy friend betray thy trust ?’

When the Archbishop had heard all the story—how Alured, instead of forwarding his friend’s suit, had himself made love to the girl, he interrupted sharply, saying :

‘But what was there touching the interests of my page, Willie ? I gathered something from the boy, but could not piece it out.’

Then, with some hesitation, as not wishing to prejudice one who had been his friend, Standish told how Alured had made Willie's sister love him, only to cast her off and pursue another, as the haggard* checks at every feather and swoops on none.

The Archbishop looked very grave at this, and got up and strode about the room in wrath; then returned and sat him down by Standish, and sighed heavily. The squire murmured:

'It hath grieved my father full sore, and it irks me to see it. But God help me! this quarrel shall go no further, and I will meet my rival on the old footing and bear him outwardly no malice.'

'I thank thee, Standish; thou art an honest lad, and full of affection and gratitude. But tutor thy heart to put away the angry thought, and—unless this lady be indeed a very virtuous damsel—tutor thyself to forget one who seemeth to be more for him than for thee. Let me read what thy favourite—alas! that he should be doing such harm to the holy Church by his fierce and angry denunciations of the Pope—here it is: for he mixeth words of wisdom with his gall. He saith, "Marie, Christ's moder, was full of grace; for none other was so sad in belief, ne so meek, ne so chaste, ne so good in all manner holiness. If thou wilt have part of Marie's bliss and God's blessing, sue Marie in this holy life." Do so, my son, and may the Spirit of Peace guide thee into His truth.'

Standish bowed, and left Simon of Sudbury alone in the scriptorium.

* Untrained hawk.

CHAPTER XV.

IT had been a hot day; the evening was cool, and the shaded streets were inviting to those whose low-browed chambers gave but little air and light. London Bridge, with its quaint gabled houses and clashing water-mills beneath each span, was a pretty sight from Paul's Wharf, whither Langland and his daughter had strolled after vespers sung at St. Paul's.

The silver Thames was alive with the barges of great nobles and rich merchants moving in stately swan-measure to and fro, with their gaily-painted hulls and streaming banners; wherries, too, were shooting swiftly by or athwart the stream, rowed by men in livery; here and there the City apprentices were tilting with wooden lances at the water-quintain, and peals of laughter greeted the unlucky wight who missed his aim at the painted Saracen and splashed headlong into the water.

'Aye, lass,' said Langland, 'tis a bonny sight, an 'twould last.'

'What meaneth my father?' asked Carlotta, putting up her slim fingers to arrange a stray tress which had fallen down her back.

'Why, there be many muttered words of discon-

tent abroad—not only out in the fields, where the free labourers are chafing against the wilful attempt of the lords to reduce them again to villainage, but even here in the taverns the craftsmen are grumbling against the severe rules of the guilds, which, they say, press hard upon the poor and give all the profits to the master. I wot not how it shall end. But I have warned the great, and done my best to moderate the just demands of the tiler and armourer.’

As Langland spoke a handsome gilded barge ranged up alongside Paul’s Wharf, from which stepped several persons of distinction.

As Carlotta was observing the ladies’ slashed sleeves and yellow hair built into golden pyramids, she overheard one of the young nobles say :

‘Yon tall man with the black-haired girl is Long Will—the mad poet.’

Carlotta’s black eyes flashed fire at the speaker. A second squire of these fair dames said :

‘Give you good-den,* Sir Clerk; and, Mistress Carlotta, good-den to thee.’

As Carlotta inclined her head, she heard one of the young damsels say :

‘Carlotta! I have heard of her. Let me have speech with her, prythee.’

‘Mistress Carlotta, I have heard a certain squire speak handsomely of thy beautiful eyes; and soothly, he hath spoken of thee as he found thee.’

Carlotta made a reverence somewhat stiff and stately, and the corners of her mouth dropped a little, leaving a suspicion of disdain in her face. She

* Good-evening.

met the eyes of the yellow-haired girl with a calm stare, which seemed to irritate her, for when her companion said, 'Come, lady Sibyl, we shall be left behind,' she replied, 'One moment! I am only wondering at the muteness of this statue done in marble, that I had mistaken at first sight for flesh and blood.'

With this parting shot, lady Sibyl ran off to rejoin her companions, leaving Carlotta rather bewildered. Who could this squire have been who had praised her at court? Surely Alured had not talked of her to this flippant damsel! It was thoughtlessly done, if he had so spoken. Altogether Carlotta walked homewards in a troubled mood. The tone of the lady had been supercilious and taunting; Carlotta's feminine instinct told her that it was the voice of an enemy.

They walked eastward along old Fish Street as far as the Church of Holy Trinity the Less; then, turning to the left, they went up Hosier Lane into Cheap, and so to the right through the Poultry. The stalls had all been cleared away, and the apprentices had gone out into Moorfields to shoot at the prickles;* but the streets were full of women and priests, monks and friars, and bells were tolling from the City churches on all sides. Langland said moodily:

'See, Calote, the drones are abroad! So many friars, black and white, all begging for the pride of their order; so many monks setting aside the rule of St. Benet or St. Bernard, and gadding abroad; so many priests, gleaning where the friars have left a

* Targets.

sorry meal behind ; parish priests and chantry priests and guild priests ! Peter ! we should be a holy nation if cowls and tonsures counted for aught. But the sin is suffered to go unchecked, if the purse can buy indulgence. Why ! even the aldermen, headed by Master John of Northampton, exclaim against the Bishop of London for his lax measures against open sinners.'

'Bishop Courtney be severe enough against heretics, father.'

'Aye, lass ; but hither cometh mother out o' breath.'

Dame Langland came running up much flurried and scared.

'Oh ! Goodman Langland, there ye be at last ; there's been a mort* o' men asking after thee, forsooth.'

'What lack they, mother ? more copies of " Pier's Ploughman's Vision " ?'

'Go to ! and a murrain take thy Ploughman and all his tribe. Thy Lady Meed and thy Dobet and the like have brought us all to doom at last. They have a warrant—an Archdeacon's warrant—out against thee, and thou art cleped† heretic, and art to appear at the Bishop's court to answer for thy miswritings.'

'Gabriel shall blow his horn‡ ere I answer that summons.'

'Oh, father !' cried Carlotta ; 'to refuse obedience would be full parlous.'§

Langland looked at his child, and the 'mother'

* Many. † Called. ‡ The last trump. § Perilous.

came into his eyes and throat, for he was wondering what would become of her if he should be haled off to the Bishop's prison.

'Were the good Duke, John of Gaunt, in London, we might appeal to him for succour,' said Dame Langland.

'I have it,' cried Carlotta; 'father and I shall hie away to Lambeth and crave the Archbishop's protection.'

'For myself, I want no protection,' answered Langland slowly.

'There! mark him! interrupted the dame; 'he hath no kind wit,* poor creature, but must needs hold up his head like a big lord. Well, as you brew, so shall you drink.'

'For myself, I said; but for thee, good dame, and my pretty minion there, I must shorten sail. I will go with thee, Calote.'

'Marry! now hast thou more sense in thy pan than I might trow. Wilt have a panade or a simnel-cake with thee?'

'No, I thank it. Good-den to thee, wife, and keep the door for us to-night, if haply we return free and fetish.'

'God be wi' ye,' said the dame, wiping the corner of one eye ruefully.

Then Langland and his daughter got them to boat for Lambeth.

That evening, it being nearly a week since Standish received his dagger-thrust, the page Willie entered the Archbishop's solar, or private chamber, and said timidly :

* Common sense.

'A young woman would have private speech with your grace.'

'A young woman—and at this hour! impossible, my son!' Then, seeing the look of disappointment in the boy's face, he added, 'Who is she?'

'My sister.'

'Strange child thou! If she be in distress, bring her in, and stay at the door. His sister? Some appeal for florins, I fear.'

Willie returned with Carlotta, who made a deep curtsy before his grace. Simon of Sudbury lifted his hand and blessed her. His quick eye was not long in taking in her marble beauty and evident distress.

'Speak, my daughter; can I in aught do good to thee or thine?'

Carlotta put her hand upon her heart to still the beating, and the prelate saw with surprise how small was the hand and how white the arm of this poor girl. But when she began to speak he leaned forward, for never had so rich and mellow a tone sounded before in his private chamber.

'Need the sister of thy page crave pardon for this intrusion, my lord?'

'Not at all—a boy passing quick and good—not at all.'

'I had hoped I should have thy sympathy, for Willie hath oftentimes told us how tender and merciful thou art to thy household.'

'He was cracking words,* the little varlet; I am hard and irritable and sour.'

* Exaggerating.

Carlotta smiled ; and the influence of that smile who could resist ?

‘ We are in trouble, please your grace ; the Bishop of London hath ordered his Archdeacon to summon my poor father.’

‘ Summon him ? For what ?’

‘ For heresy, my Lord Archbishop.’

‘ Oh ! that is a grave matter ! Heresy ! that hath an ill sound, indeed. My Lord of London is a very sleuth-hound in such matters.’

‘ But my father is no heretic, as your grace very well wotteth ; for thou hast his book, and ofttimes—so Willie says—thou dost read on it and laugh and make notes therein.’

‘ Yea, by my fay, good daughter ; not so trippingly with thy tongue, I beseech thee. “Heresy,” saidst thou ? Courtney carries this too far. Heresy ? but this must be looked into.’

‘ I challenge thee or any theologian in England to prove the charge.’

Carlotta stood like a prophetess, her large eyes sparkling, the colour flaming in her cheek, her voice trembling with emotion.

‘ Hush ! calm thyself, my dear child. Thy father may answer the Bishop’s charge of heresy ; but if I accuse him of speaking ill of dignities, what answer canst thou give ?’

‘ That he hath written to serve God and His truth. That he despiseth favel* and meed,† and rank and wealth, where conscience bids him deal villainy in high places a shrewd blow.’

* Flattery.

† Bribery.

‘Humph! but he hath received no license to censure ill the knights, the bishops, the great lords of council. He goeth beyond his brief.’

‘So did John the Baptist, so did our Lord Himself. I beseech thee, holy father, look upon him as no mean man. All his days is he bemoaning this sinful England, and deviseth ever to do it good.’

‘Yes, yes! but he is only William Langland the scribe. We must use some reason in these matters. Now, if he were Chancellor and Archbishop like myself, he might—but even I should shrink from speaking out so boldly concerning things which did not concern me.’

‘Oh! my Lord Archbishop, thank God that there is one man in England who dare tell you to your face what is truth and what is sin. Thank God there is one man who fears not torture and recks not of reward, but will utter aloud the warning sent of heaven.’

‘Aye—of heaven—how am I to know it cometh of heaven? Here is my Lord Courtney complaining that the message smelleth of brimstone.’

This last unlucky pleasantry completely broke Carlotta down. She covered her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

Simon of Sudbury rose and took her hand. He had not meant to be unkind, and yet he knew not how to remedy his mistake.

‘Weep not, weep not, my daughter; come hither and sit at my knee. Let us take counsel together. Come! here are my notes on thy father’s book. What have I written? Now! now! thou shalt be

his advocate, I the judge. Let us see what this same heretic hath written of us. Many good bits of sound learning and wisdom, of course, I find here noted—such as, “The lever child the more lore behoveth,”* and “Love is the treacle† of heaven,” and this :

“For though ye be true of your tongue, and truly win,
And as chaste as a child that in church weepeth,
Unless ye love loyalty and lend to the poor,
Ye ne have no merit in mass ne in hours.”

Yea, but thy father’s wit runneth chiefly into satire, such as

“Pilgrims and palmers plighted them togeder
To seek St. James and saints in Rome.
They went forth in their way with many wise tales,
And hadden leave to lie all their life after.”

It were wiser, though, not to draw a sword against the Holy Father of Rome himself. Mark this :

“And Reason prayed the Pope have pity on Holy Church,
And ere he give any grace, govern first himself.”

Now, would he keep to such subjects of satire as Juvenal handled, we should have no coil about heresy. That was good advice he gave the glutton, “Drink but mid the ducks, and dine but once,” and “Let not Sir Surfeit sit at thy board”—and about the leeches,‡ too,

“And if thou diet thee thus, I dare lay mine ears.
That physick shall his furred hoods for his food sell,
And his cloak of Calabria, with all the knobs of gold ;
For murderers are many leeches : Lord, them amend !
They do men die thro’ their drinks, ere destiny it would.”

* The dearer child needs more teaching.

† Sovereign remedy.

‡ Doctors.

By my fay, but he oftentimes hitteth the nail on the head.'

'My father, thou hast picked out all the shrewd speeches, as one should pick the comfits out of a cake. Give me leave to remind thee that the "Vision" is full of holy texts, and praise of them that do well. My father doth not willingly speak ill of dignities; of friars and pardoners he hath not much good sith the pest, but monks he alloweth.*

"For if heaven be on this earth, and ease to any soul,
It is in cloister or in school, by many skills I find;
For in cloister cometh no man, to chide, ne to fight,
But all is buxomness† there and books to read and to learn."

'Good! But what meaneth this passage about the King that shall put an end to monasteries? Is that a prophecy, prythee?'

'Ah! my lord intendeth the passage beginning—

"And then shall the Abbot of Abingdon and all his issue for
ever
Have a knock of a king, and incurable the wound.'"'

'The same, my daughter. Of what art thinking so sadly?'‡

'Only,' said Carlotta, lifting her smiling eyes and looking the Archbishop full in the face—'only that if the author were called in, he might himself explain.'

'What! is Langland here? Go thou and summon him hither.'

Meanwhile Simon of Sudbury strode up and down

* Praiseth.

† Obedience.

‡ Seriously.

uneasily. It was very awkward for him any way. He did not wish to offend so strong a man as Bishop Courtney, nor could he fairly see a man condemned whose writings he was himself so fond of perusing. And the maiden was passing gentle and buxom, and so melancholy, that it gave his secular heart quite a twinge to do and say anything which might give her pain.

CHAPTER XVI.

CARLOTTA returned to the Archbishop's solarium with her father, who bowed and then looked round the room in a very abstracted manner, as if hardly realizing whose presence he was in.

'Shall I retire, gracious my lord?' asked Carlotta.

'Yea; go and have speech with thy brother.'

Langland stood for some minutes in silence. The Archbishop had resumed his seat, and was scrutinizing his visitor keenly.

'Be seated, Master Langland. A very good boy of thine is Willie, but much I fear me his strength is not sufficient.'

'Alas! must he, then, leave this excellent household?'

'Thou dost take* me not. I mean his health is not sufficient to keep his hold on life.'

'Ah!'

There was a deep pathos in the solemn tone, and the start which the Archbishop's words had given the poor man recalled his mind from its wandering aimlessness.

'He hath the sweating sickness, it doubts me.

* Understand.

Oft o' nights I may bend o'er his truckle-bed and find the poor lad moiled and damp, while the brain sleeps not, but works on the day's foregone events, with murmured cries and prayers piteous to hear.'

Langland wiped away a tear and made an effort to speak :

'It is passing good of my lord. Willie loves his master. We are all grateful, though the words come not full readily.'

'I believe it. Speak not of thanks, for the boon is mutual. The dear child is so quick and thoughtful, prompt to prevent* my lightest wish, and forward in all the degrees of courtesy. By the way, Langland, were it not a good thing to get the boy some fine country air, think you? What if I send him with his family to my manor at Otford? Wilt go?'

'Your grace is too good to us. Otford! I have heard from Master Chaucer how sweetly it nestles beneath the chalk downs, and there, too, woneth† good Master Gower, the poet.'

'It is sooth; Geoffrey Chaucer doth oftentimes visit him there. But thou must be ready to truss‡ betimes, for the child faileth every day. And, Master Langland, what is this I hear about a charge of heresy? I can find no warrant for such charge in thy book.'

'No, in good sooth; but he who holdeth the mirror up to vice shall reap his reward in back-friends§ and maligners.'

'Howbeit, thou hast meddled|| with thy sound

* Anticipate.

† Lives.

‡ Pack.

§ Enemies.

|| Mingled.

reason some naughty words of disdain in despite of the Holy Pope and his Bishops.'

'I am willing to submit all to your grace's judgment. May I recite some lines I have writ about the Pope ?

"Now hath the Pope power pardon to grant the people
Withouten any penance, to passen into heaven ;
This is our belief, as lettered men us teacheth,
Yet I rede* you, ranks that rich be on this earth,
Be ye never the bolder to break the ten hests.†
At the dreadful doom, when dead shallen arise,
And comen all before Christ, accounts to yield,
A poke full of pardons here, ne provincial letters,
Though ye be found in the fraternity of all the four orders,‡
And have indulgences double-fold ; unless Do-well you help,
I set your patents and your pardons at one pie's heel."§

The Archbishop sat thinking, with his head on his hand, and when Langland paused, he looked up and said :

'Enough ! that thou meanest well I am fully convinced. So also did Master Wyclif at first, and he was my good friend. But mark how the stream carries you on when once you leave the bank ; you cannot swim against it. You begin by scoffing at sin ; you end by scoffing at God's ministers.'

'Yea, so that they be doing the devil's work. For my part, I shall keep no truce with leasing|| and lechery and gluttony. The seven deadly sins are my deadly foes. If I suffer for speaking the truth, then I suffer in God's service ; but I shall commend my wife and children most heartily to your grace's

* Advise.

† Commandments.

‡ Of friars.

§ Magpie's.

|| Lying.

protection. I am weak enough to wish to spare those weak creatures, an it please thee to shield them.'

The Archbishop rose, and began striding rapidly from wall to wall, muttering to himself all the while, and tossing his head up and down.

'Upon my life, Langland, I don't know which is the bigger fool—thou or my Lord of London—thou for tilting à outrance at the evil which must cling about all things of this world, he for taking umbrage at thy saying. But give me leave to tell thee that I cast my cloak over thee. None shall hurt thine, nor thee. Secondly, let me, as one versed in affairs, to whom much of the ordering of this kingdom hath been committed—let me speak frankly with thee. If thou thinkest that my eyes are closed to the evils in the world—aye, and in the Church—thou dost me foul wrong. I have ever, both in the See of London and at Canterbury, been for reform. Thou hast fallen upon the vices of pilgrims. Did not I incur a life-long hatred by my heady words uttered in 1370? It was the fourth jubilee of the Festival of St. Thomas of Canterbury, when I overtook a large band of pilgrims, japing, telling of tales, harping and swearing and wantoning. I was moved with indignation at the sight of so much carnal wordliness in those who were pretending to make a religious pilgrimage. I reined in my horse, and when one ribald cried out on me for a blessing, I plainly told them that the plenary indulgence which they hoped to gain by their visit to the holy city would be of no avail to them. Many were dumb with shame, but

some cursed me to my face. One Kentish knight, Sir Thomas of Aldon, rode straight up to me and shouted in the ears of the folk :

“My Lord Bishop, for this act of thine, stirring the folk to sedition against St. Thomas, I stake the salvation of my soul that thou wilt close thy life by a most terrible death.”

‘To this all the baser pilgrims answered, “Amen ! Amen !” I await the fulfilment of that prophecy.’

A cry of anguish burst from Langland’s lips ; his eyes seemed fixed upon a corner of the room ; he was conscious of nothing but what he saw, or thought he saw ; motionless and mute he stood.

‘What ho ! within ! Help !’ The Archbishop’s cry brought in Willie, who no sooner saw his father than he whispered :

‘It is a vision ! He is rarely so ; but suffer him to be quiet ; he will revive.’

Slowly the glazed eyes began to brighten ; but the tongue stammered forth in half-articulate words :

‘What ! poor old man ! spare him that indignity ; bury the poor head ! Nay, carry it not on yon pole for ribalds to flout. Poor, poor priest !’

Simon of Sudbury was a lawyer not prone to superstition, but he felt a strange chill creep over him ; howbeit, with his own hands he fetched water and bathed the poet’s temples.

Langland never told anyone what that vision had been until an event occurred in June of the following year which forcibly recalled to him this prophetic seeing of the future.

Meanwhile Carlotta had been taken by Willie into

the garden, and as they paced along the terrace walk, looking down upon the flowing river and the moving boats, the Parliament House and great monastery of Westminster on the opposite bank, Alured of Dene came bowing and capering, in his short cloak and tight-fitting stockings.

‘This is a privilege, in sooth, dear Mistress Lottie,’ he said.

Carlotta blushed and smiled. Poor child! what knew she of his fickle moods and selfish pleasure-seeking?

‘I am here with my father, so please you,’ she replied.

‘Willie, my boy, run within; I think his grace is calling on thee.’

The boy ran off; the lovers exchanged a pleasant laugh.

‘How long it is since we met!’ said Alured, bending down to look into Carlotta’s face. ‘I see thine eyes are as black and as winsome as ever. Ay de mi! I must write another sonnet on them to-night in rhyme.’

‘Thou hadst better court Lady Sleep, foolish squire. But why hast not come to see my father of late? Why send thy friend Standish?’

‘I send Standish?’ said Alured, opening his blue eyes innocently wide; ‘did he say I sent him, pretty minion?’

‘No; that did he not! But go not about to try and abuse* me with wide wonder-gaze, as if I could not see through all thy mummary.’

* Deceive.

‘Benedicite! Of course I sent him! What brought he thee?’

‘Nought, as thou must know well; he ‘well-nigh took something away, though.’

‘What! a morsel of thy foolish, palpitating heart?’

‘He shall have it an thou be not more frank with me. But it is thy way to do a kindness and disguise it; yet it is a kindness.’

‘It glads me to hear thee say so.’

Alured mused a little. What could be this kindness which Standish had done, and which Carlotta credited him with conceiving? If it were anything worth considering, perhaps it might be as well to take credit for it. It would serve Standish right. What business had he to go calling on Carlotta? Certainly he deserved a penalty for the impertinence. So thinking, he tried to win the secret from her.

‘So he nearly took it away, did he?’

‘Yea; but why go so round about to help father?’

‘Why! thy father is passing proud and digne.*

Carlotta clapped her hands.

‘Ah! I knew it was thy kind heart and delicate reserve that prompted all. Dost really not want the books—nor the money?’

‘Books! no! thy father’s books are little to my liking.’

‘I knew it, Alured; and that made thy sacrifice all the dearer unto me. Dost know? who loves father, him love I.’

‘I wist it was so, Lottie; that was why I sent Standish.’

* Haughty.

‘Ah! beware of that same friend; for he sat him down by the window in our solar, and began addressing me in such solemn, melancholy tones, looking me through well-nigh with his big brown eyes—I was afeard what he was going to confess, and . . .’

‘Dost mean to say he dared make love to thee?’

‘It feared me so; I rose and ended the talk full sudden.’

Alured burst into a loud laugh; it tickled him to think that Standish had been paying him off in his own coin.

Standish, too! that model of virtue and conscience and principle. It would make a good story some day in the knights’ parlour. But Carlotta did not at all like his receiving it with a laugh. She turned her back and pouted and tossed her head; he should have taken it with indignation, she thought, if he loved her as—as she feared she loved him. And before they could make it up, Willie returned, saying:

‘Father has had one of his visions, Lottie.’

‘Another “fair field full of folk”?’ asked Alured with a laugh.

‘No,’ whispered the boy; ‘this time it is a priest’s head carried on a pole about London streets.’

‘Thy father should go and be blooded,’ said Alured.

‘Perchance thou wouldst blood him as thou didst John Standish with thy dagger this day sen’night,’* said Willie fiercely.

* Week.

'What was that?' asked Carlotta, turning to Alured.

'Only a little private quarrel about thee, Lottie.'

'Nay! it was about me,' said the boy indignantly; 'for thou wert over-hard with me, and my friend Standish boxed thy ears roundly, and thou didst blubber—so the armourers said—and . . .'

'Go to, thou pert pillicock, or I shall . . .'

'Aye, and Standish, all unarmed, met thee with thy dagger; and I would he had pulled thy nose off for a white-livered coward!'

'Hush! Willie; be not so bold with thy tongue,' said his sister; 'and do thou, Alured, tell me all about it. Was it for me thou didst fight thy companion?'

'Yea; but it was nothing—mere play. His grace saw the encounter. I pray thee think no more of it than I do.'

'But if it was for my sake, Alured?'

'Well, partly for thy sake. I did not like the tone Standish took about his visit to thee—it nettled me.'

Carlotta gave him, the liar! one of her sweetest smiles, and he quieted his conscience with thinking that by indulging in a little mystification he had made the poor girl happy.

They parted with mutual confidence; but Alured could not help wondering what Standish had done about the books to please Carlotta so much, and why he had gone to see her at all. It was not like old Standish to play the fox and poach in other men's preserves.

After long musing he said to himself :

‘It must be so ; love hath made him jealous. Jealousy desireth revenge, and revenge saith, “Go, rob this fellow of his love.” Yea ; but I will be even with him—I will see the lady Sibyl.’

CHAPTER XVII.

Two men were walking across the green in Otford village. The boys and girls, who were playing barley-break, or kiss-in-the-ring, on the sward—for it was eventide—paused in their mirth and bowed or curtsied to the taller of the two men. This was no other than Master John Gower, a gentleman of some means, who had a manor at Otford—a poet, too, and a friend of Geoffrey Chaucer, whom he was conducting to the Archbishop's manor.

Chaucer, with his small rounded frame, his forked tawny beard and elvish face, his gray-blue eyes, rather prominent finely-chiselled nose, and sweet modest look, was a great contrast to his friend Gower, who was tall and thin and somewhat darker, dressed in black with much precision, curled his long hair neatly, and had no laces untied, like Chaucer, no knife harnessed dangling from his neck; never burst, like Chaucer, into loud laughter which set the folk a-smiling; and altogether was more of a dignified landlord than an inspired maker of verse.

'Thou art made much of, friend Gower, by these young folk. Why not indite some verse in our English tongue? Believe me, the time shall come

when both Norman poems and Latin elegiacs shall go unread. When I see young folk like these, I am always reminded that to them belongs the future. The old learning is no longer for the few; the yeoman in his courtesy* shall soon learn to read, for friars and Lollards are stepping down into the pool of ignorance and disturbing the waters of thought.'

'Ah! there we differ. For my part, I only care to write for the learned; not but what I admire thy early essays in English verse—thy "Parliament of Birds," and "Court of Love," and the "Book of the Duchess."'

'I have another theme in hand, John, and that is to bring together a party of pilgrims to Canterbury and make them tell stories as they ride. I thought of that once when I came to Otford and saw the pilgrims pass along "The Pilgrims' Way" yonder.'

'Humph! I begin to think, Geoffrey, that thou art misled by that strange, rough man who wrote the "Vision Concerning Piers' Ploughman."'

'In alliterative verse he wrote. There I think he, too, is behind his time. The day of alliterative verse is gone by.'

So chatting together, they came to the iron gates which led to the manor of Simon of Sudbury.

The porter opened the wicket to them, cap in hand.

'Any news, Wat, from London?' said Master Gower.

'News inside for them as like it, Master Gower.

* Short cloth jacket.

His grace hath sent some visitors here—a nice young lady, and a little boy, and a passing tall—well, he looks like a cleric—who goes a-meandering and a-moaning and a-chaunting of anthems all over the grounds when folk are in their beds.’

‘That’s a pity, Wat; I wished to show Master Chaucer over the pleasance and the gardens.’

‘Oh! be sure ye can go about and welcome, Master Gower.’

The two poets advanced up the drive towards the manor-house, which had two wings flanked by towers, so built that in front of the house was a grass plot surrounded on three sides by the walls of the manor. They passed through the hall into the pleasance at the back of the house, and descried under a large beech-tree at the end of the lawn the visitors spoken of before. The tall man was standing with his back to them, and was reciting to the others.

‘Marie! if it be not Will Langland himself!’ said Chaucer.

They were soon laughing over the happy meeting, and Gower’s grave face, on being introduced to ‘Long Will,’ made Chaucer smile.

‘Thou hast been to Oxford schools?’ asked Gower.

‘I was taught by the monks of Malvern, and for a short time I went to Oxford; but it was harder living than if I had swinked at delving in Gloucester. We enjoyed the roaming about and begging our way with singing of *Salve Regina* at rich men’s doors; though once we had a scurvy trick played on us. Thou mindest the tale, Willie?’

The boy laughed, saying :

‘Tell the gentlemen, father.’

‘We had come—a college friend and I—to the house of a certain knight in Oxfordshire, and begged for a supper as being poor scholars of Oxenford, when the knight came out and swore we were no true scholars, but lewd beggars ; whereupon he ordered his men to seize us and have us away to the well in the courtyard. And there we were each of us roped into a bucket, all the meynie and ladies of the house standing by in fits of laughter. “Now, then, my masters,” quoth that knight, “ye shall prove whether ye be true men or no. One by one ye shall be let down into the water, one by one ye shall recite alternate verses, Latin couplets, describing your sensations down below.” And in sooth we were so let down ; neither was it easy to think of anything when half-drowned, nor could we, all covered with green stuff and dripping, full cheerfully express our thoughts in most elegant Latin, and the knight said I was as surly as a dog in the kitchen, to which I replied :

“*Dum canis os rodit, sociari pluribus odit.*”

“Have him forth,” quoth he, “and suffer him to dry his doublet at the kitchen-fire.” So we went sadly forth.’

‘It was unknighly done,’ said Gower ; ‘but in these days the poor man is making himself the equal of his lord. Sith the great pest we have been alto undone ; fear of death has gone with a great rebound to the extreme of irreligion and

luxury of living. Why, even here, in Kent, where we have no villeins, but all are free labourers—even here there are loud complaints and threats of some great rising. First come the friars, preaching in the greens and streets, and tattling of what the Essex or the Hertfordshire men are going to do for their freedom; then come the Lollards with their Bible done into English, and teaching that all men are born free; and, as if we had not unbuxomness* enough in England, there come from over seas soldiers full of uplandish ideas about equality forsooth; then our friend, the Chancellor, setteth King and subjects by the ears by his heavy taxes; anon comes in the sense of better times gone by, before the Statute of Labourers, passed in 1349, limited the rate of wages to what it was before the Black Death, and tied once more the serf and villein to the land where he was born.'

'That was a most cruel and unjust law,' said Langland.

'Ah! if thou wert a vavasour† thou wouldst sing another song.'

'Give me leave to tell thee, Master Gower, an I were a serf bound to do service to my lord, obliged to pay head-money if I wanted to leave the parish, and liable to be hunted like a wolf if I did not return—liable to be sold "with my litter"—for so they clepe a man's family—at any change of owner; bound to work without wage and pay reliefs and fines, and malt-silver and wood-silver and larder-silver; branded on the forehead if I ran away, and

* Disobedience.

† Small land-owner.

disabled by law from buying my freedom with my own savings—I say, were I so fixed, either as cotter or bordar, to work all the year round, or as villein to help at seed-time and harvest, I would set on foot such a conspiracy as should shake this land to her centre.’

‘Thy friend is a most dangerous enthusiast,’ said Gower.

Chaucer laughed and toyed with Carlotta’s hand.

‘Nay, John; see yon drooping violet of a boy and this lily-of-the-valley. These be the hostages Langland hath given to stand by the old order. Trust him to peril not so fair a “litter.”’

‘My father,’ said Carlotta, ‘hath dreamed much of late on civil war. But dreams go by contraries, I am told.’

Gower and Langland shook their heads at this want of faith. Chaucer, with twinkling eyes, affected much horror at the impiety, saying:

‘So young and yet so faithless! hast never heard of the friar of Oxenford who, finding a pair of shoes on the stairs of his lodgings, put them on and wore them at matins, as the night was cold? But when he returned to his bed to sleep till prime, behold! he dreamed he was travelling from Gloucester to Oxford when Robert’s men* fell upon him, crying “Kill! kill!” “I am a friar,” he shouted; “I am a friar.” “Thou liest! thou art shod.” Then the friar lifted up his foot in disproof of the charge. To his horror the shoe was there. He awoke, hot and trembling, and found himself holding up his shod foot in his bed of

* Robbers.

straw. "Heaven do so to me, and more also," he cried, "an I do not deal with thee as a thing accursed." With these words he started up, and flung the shoe out of window.'

A thin smile overspread the dark features of Langland. He had a sense of humour, but it was not so rich and racy as that which Chaucer possessed. Langland was too sad and serious to feel the quaint incongruities of life. The experiences of the great pest had cast a sombre colour over the whole tone of thought. He was a moralist first, a poet afterwards. He embodied the feeling of the lower class of Englishmen, to whom the deeper problems of life, *le grand peut-être*, the fear of something after death, were ever present; while Geoffrey Chaucer, bred among courtiers and nourished on the literature of France and Italy, sonnet and story, was of a gayer mood, rejoicing in the colour and form of all that was beautiful in nature, laughing over the weaknesses of human nature where Langland would have wept for the pity of it, and essentially a poet first, and a moralist only to save appearances in the eyes of the Church.

Gower and Langland strolled across the lawn, deep in politics; Chaucer stayed by his two young friends. In front of them rose the downs, scarred here and there with chalk cuttings, and dotted with the yew-trees that marked the Pilgrims' Way half-way up the side of the hill. The valley in which Otford nestled was thick with trees, and not many miles off to the west rose another range of chalk hills crowned with a forest of beeches. Otford Manor, with its

castellated wings, its pigeon-house and stables, was thus securely sheltered from all the winds that blow.

‘Hast any more stories about dreams, sir?’ asked Willie.

‘Yea, my child; but hither cometh the leech to know thy humours. Let us first bid him do his devoir.’

A little man was approaching them, habited as a clerk, his surcoat being of perse or sky-blue, lined with taffeta and sendal; he carried a stick with a knob of gold.

After the first greetings, Chaucer said:

‘The boy seemeth weak, good Master Chirurgeon, in spite of thy astronomical knowledge and magic natural.’

‘Ah! I must take the position of his influential planet again. We men of physic may know the causes of a malady, when engendered, and of what humour; we may give the patient drugs and lectuaries according to the wise teaching of Esculapius, Hippocras, Avicenna, and Galen, but we cannot overmaster the subtle influences of the starry world.’

‘That I can well believe,’ said Chaucer with mock gravity.

‘We may measure out to the child his diet, nourishing and digestible; we may even, out of our regard for the good Archbishop, mingle gold with his milk; but if the planets frown upon us, where be we?’

‘Ah, indeed!’ echoed Chaucer, winking at Willie, and making the poor little patient nearly die of suppressed laughter.

‘See now,’ the physician said, pointing to the boy’s red face; ‘even while I stand here a new phase hath come over him; his planet hath in all probability entered a second house in heaven; he, from being cold, hath waxed hot of a sudden; and this from no cause visible to the merely human eye.’

‘Certainly not,’ quoth Chaucer, nudging Carlotta with his elbow.

‘Dear St. Luke! the boy must chew some mastick, and then get him to sleep; there is much virtue in your sound sleep for the keeping off of humours and rheums; but, God pardon me! he must not sleep o’ days unless he stand by the cupboard; if he stand by the cupboard—mark me!—he may sleep before sun-down.’

‘I shall make a note of that, if thou wilt permit me,’ said Chaucer. ‘He may drink before sun-down if he stand by the cupboard, methinks thou saidst, Master Chirurgeon?’

‘No, no! “Drink!” Tush! Tush! “Sleep,” Master Chaucer; “sleep,” quotha. He might drink water of cinnamon in an ampulle* of lead that hath been blessed at Canterbury, but no bragot,† I thank it. If he be too merry, let him have boiled cabbage; an he be weak in the eyes, lentils; and withal the best bread—simnel, or pain de main, or coket.’

‘It is a liberal education to hear thee talk,’ replied Chaucer.

‘I have been told so before,’ said the little man, puffing out his chest in a southerly direction. ‘Dost like clarré, Master Chaucer? My wife is even now

* Flask.

† Ale flip.

compounding a quantum at twelve-pence the gallon. Oh, I believe you, 'tis passing good for the stomach.'

'When the planets are favourable,' added Chaucer.

'Of course! of course! but let me see: take a gallon of honey, skim it well, and look when it be boiled that it be a gallon; anon take seven gallon of red wine—Vernage or Muscadel—one pound of cinnamon, half a pound of ginger, a quarter of a pound of pepper, and meddle all these togeder and do him in a clean barrel, stop it fast with a bung, and roll it well oft for three days.'

'And then drink it standing by the cupboard?'

'Yea, Marie! by the cupboard or where thou wilt.'

'For myself,' said Chaucer gravely, 'I drink nothing but essence of quicksilver, orpiment, sal-ammoniac and brimstone.'

'I marvel at it, sir; 'twould kill most folk.'

'Aye! 'tis passing marvellous. But thou sittest sadly, taking thought on somewhat, fair lily.'

'Yea,' said Carlotta; 'my father hath thrice had a gruesome vision of our good Archbishop, and it maketh me full pensive.'

'A truce to all sadness in this summer-tide; I shall sing you the song of Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight, if it likes thee.'

Then Master Chaucer held them spell-bound till the birds went to roost in the branches overhead, the sunset red faded to orange and yellow over the beeches in the west, and the shadow of the manor-house warned them that the moon was peeping at them, and they must to bed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE few weeks which Willie spent at Otford were a great pleasure to him, if the promise of renewed health was not fully maintained. He and his sister were delighted with the trim garden paths, set about with flowers; the fish-ponds where the tench and trout shot like silver to and fro; the dove-cote where the pigeons cooed all day; the mews where the falcons blinked and pruned their plumes, and put on such a look of pity when the falconer impeded a broken wing. Then they would go forth in the eventide and laugh to see the swains carol on the green, with dancing, and harping, and playing club-ball or dun in the mire, or barley-break. Once they attended a manor-court, when all the tenants and labourers came to hear the reeve or bailiff give his awards; where the miller, as being the second greatest man after the reeve, had a chair set for him on the dais in the hall beside the reeve and the visitors. Then the long court-roll was unfolded, and disputes as to fines and reliefs were arranged; fines were inflicted on such as had broken the assize of bread and beer, for in those days every loaf must have the baker's sign impressed upon it; it must be made of such quality of flour as it professed, simnel and manchet or the coarse tourte.

Joan dropped her curtsy and craved leave for her lass to marry young Wat, and Hob would know if he might put his son to school for a clerk of low degree, since it would ill become him to seek, without leave given, to quit his own lewd* station. Anon Robert, the roper, was amerced† for harbouring strange folk, seeing that none might harbour strangers for more than a day and a night, unless he was prepared to take them into his frank-pledge, and be responsible for any crimes they might commit.

And one day all the church bells were set a-ringing, and there came with clear jingling in the wind the Archbishop himself, riding on his mule apparelled with saddle-cloth of blood-colour, and after him his clerks, carrying his capella,‡ and then his squires and knights all in goodly array. They stayed but one night on their way to Charing, but the spectacle was striking enough to invest the quiet country life with fresh interest. For Master Gower had gone away to Southwark, but not before he had spun out many a long tale of landlords' grievances in the ears of Langland, leaving that enthusiast a little dashed in hope, and more ready to see that it would not do to let the villeins get the mastery: while Master Gower for his part had been led to meditate on various social problems from a point of view more near to the Sermon on the Mount than he had ever reached before.

On the morning after the Archbishop's arrival, Carlotta and Willie were mounted on ponies in order to accompany the party as far as Malling. Their road lay at first along the Pilgrims' Way, which

* Unlearned.

† Fined.

‡ Sacred vessels.

avoided the hamlets and villages, for the most part, and pursued a lonely course along the side of the chalk hills. They then struck into the King's high-road, and cantered merrily along through the pleasant Kentish forest. Alured, who at first felt rather shy of talking to Carlotta in the presence of so many riders, no sooner saw Standish chatting and laughing with her than he flamed with jealousy, and found occasion to ask him sneeringly whether he had been investing in any more old books.

Standish looked him calmly in the face without replying, but Alured went on :

'If thou thinkest by meed and bribery to creep into my lady's affections, thou utterly misreadest her character.'

'Her? Whose? Thou hast so many loves.'

'It is not in accordance with the rules of knight-hood to offer money for love. I myself have never stooped to such a thing.'

'I believe it: I have seldom seen thee give even a Jane* in charity.'

'Charity, forsooth! Carlotta needeth no charity.'

'I said not she did; but I say that if she stood on the verge of penury, it would go ill with her, Dene, if she depended on thee.'

'I have not the abundant means which thou possessest.'

'No: thy means go to bedizen thy back and legs. If thou art offended with me for speaking her fair this morn, go thyself and pay thy court, like a man, if indeed thou art not a false wooer.'

* Coin of Genoa.

‘What I am is no affair of thine.’

‘What thou doest to her, or any other innocent maid, is quite my affair. Therefore, look to it! for it shall be a course à outrance.’

‘Boasting as usual,’ muttered Alured as he moved away.

‘Thou hast scarce exchanged a word to-day,’ said Carlotta with a look of reproach towards Alured.

‘Thou hast given me no chance, mistress; for thy tongue made so merry with yon churlish fellow that I might not get near thee.’

‘A truce to these rejoinders. Thou knowest I have no care for him; though, me thinketh, he be a very gentle, God-fearing youth.’

‘Yea—a psalm-singing hypocrite. One who will give moneys to try and entice anyone’s love.’

‘In deed and in sooth! Sonties!* I thought thou saidst it was thou who didst furnish the moneys? I would not take it as from him.’

Alured looked vexed. His own thoughtless words had nearly convicted him of the lie. He hid his heart under a smile, and replied:

‘My dearest, I am a jealous fool—but that only proves to thee my love. Hath Standish said aught to thee of the moneys?’

‘No—nothing. He steadily avoids the subject.’

‘Because—of course I wot not—he may, for all I ken, have given thy father some of his own moneys. He hath a generous way with him.’

‘Yea; I believe it. One may see that by his frank, open face. Oh, Alured! be friends, as ye were.

* Little saints.

It was of that he spake to me. He was regretting the old love that once bound you together.'

Alured was silent. His conscience smote him for having wronged his friend by making Carlotta think that the act of kindness had been his own. Perhaps, after all, Standish had lent or given the moneys out of pity for the father, and not from love for the daughter. Then he looked at Carlotta as she ambled along on her palfry, and the stately head poised on the long, beautiful neck, the tender oval of her cheek, the kiss-worthy, drooping lips, and liquid depth of eyes dark as night—all took him as by storm, and he sighed to think how cruel Fate was, that had made Carlotta poor, and of no lineage; for, had other things been equal, he many times preferred Carlotta to Sibyl. And, again, the fear struck him that somehow she might find out that he had lied; and this fear spoiled all his better feelings, for he must needs contrive some means of screening himself. He was a fool, he thought, ever to have allowed her to think he had sent Standish with the money. In fact, he repented of his lie chiefly because it was such a very troublesome lie, and was so difficult to conceal. Carlotta had been observing his long silence. 'Is aught troubling thee—aught that I can amend?'

'No, I thank it. I have had some matter of sorrow at home. Thou knowest my father is dead; and my eldest brother hath driven out the second brother, in order to grasp all for himself.'

'Alas! then I fear me thou canst not really afford the generous help thou didst give by Master Standish. If it be so . . .'

‘Lottie, promise me never to speak of this to anyone! What I have done I can well afford. But I would hear no more of it.’

‘I can conceive thy sensitiveness, Alured, and I promise. But hither cometh the Archbishop, as though he would have speech with us.’

Simon of Sudbury rode up, and taking Carlotta by the hand, said :

‘So, my daughter, Willie tells me thou hast had joy in the woods and fields! and he, I ween, hath recovered somewhat.’

‘Gracious my lord, I thank thee heartily for this and all thy kindness to my father, brother, and myself.’

‘Ah! I have not done yet. Some day I shall bring you all to Canterbury to see the new walls and gate that I am building. But now I have other thoughts of good toward thee. I am to send some of my meynie* to the great fair at Stourbridge this September; and, if it jump with thy humour, thou canst go with some of my women to choose stuff for dresses, tapestry, and the like.’

‘Oh! that would indeed be a full charming pilgrimage.’

‘Yea; Walsingham, too, be not far off—if so be the roads be not infested with robbers. Then, I shall look to thee to help my women.’

So his grace rode off smiling out of gaiety of heart that he had thought of a conceit † by which he could pleasure the winsome thing. For even Archbishops, however ascetic, are not unimpressed

* Household.

† Idea.

by youth and beauty and charm of speech and manner.

Meanwhile Alured had sought out John Standish, and said :

‘ I have been thinking that it is rather my part than thine to help Langland ; it was kindly meant in thee, and I take back the words which my jealous love prompted. I thank thee, Standish, for teaching me a moral lesson ; but I would fain bear my part.’

‘ Well said, Alured ! Come, let us be friends once more. I vow to thee on the faith of a squire that no thought of love towards thy maiden moved my heart. But, as thou sayest, so let it be. Thou shalt pay me half, or any portion it liketh thee.’

‘ Many thanks I owe thee ; I would pay all, but that my purse is now passing low ; a half I will give willingly—but for a few weeks I must crave thy indulgence. As an earnest of desire I pray thee accept this small coin—which indeed shames me by its smallness.’

So saying, Alured gave his friend the piece of money and rode off. Standish smiled to himself :

‘ Poor Alured, if all his good intentions came to fruit, what a harvest of virtue he should reap ! Cave autem ! as the monks say, this same coin is a Luxemburger !* natheless,† I will e’en pocket it up and say nought.’

They had now reached the Benedictine Nunnery at Malling, where Carlotta and Willie were to dine and rest before returning to Otford. At the gate she bade adieu to her friends : but as she rode into the pleas-

* A name given to false money.

† Nevertheless.

ance without the cloister, Standish came cantering up, and, doffing his hat, said :

‘I crave one moment to explain myself to thee. Thou didst strangely misinterpret my words that day I chattered about the books. I never for one moment had one thought of disloyalty, of desire to win thy esteem and favour. In sooth, I love a lady—pardon me for confessing it—whom I admire much more ; to her I am engaged heart and soul, though she be somdeal hard and cruel to me.’

Carlotta inclined her head proudly ; no woman likes to be snubbed like that, but honest John Standish ran on in the simplicity of his heart, and in his ignorance of womankind, until Carlotta thanked him and said she could no longer keep the good sisters waiting.

When, after dinner, she and Willie lay in the shadow of the cloister on the smooth grass of the garth,* opposite the beautiful lancet-windows of the convent church, she paid little heed to his boyish babble, but let her heart go haunting back to the words that had been spoken that morn ; and she knew not how it was, Standish’s avowal of his complete disregard of her personal charms piqued her more than she could have thought possible.

‘Can it be,’ she said to herself, ‘that I am growing light of ’haviour, and desirous to make men admire me, though I love them not? That would indeed be unworthy of a daughter of William Langland.’

But the boy prattled so of what Standish could do

* Cloister lawn.

and what Standish had said, that at last she lost patience and cried :

‘Peace, Willie ! it irks me to hear so much of this same squire, who is somewhat rude and churlish of speech, though he may be open and true. I would hear no more of him this se’nnight.’

The boy dropped his head and was silent. Ill as he was, it gave him great sorrow to hear his sister speak so coldly of the man who had been kinder to him than anyone else : a tear fell, he was so weak. Carlotta saw and regretted her words ; she drew him to her and kissed his forehead, saying :

‘I am sorry, Will ; I forgot he was thy true friend.’

The boy murmured shyly :

‘I wish, Lottie, thou wouldst love him for my sake. He is worth a thousand of that popinjay of Dene.’

‘But he loves me not, Will,’ said Carlotta with a smile.

‘How darest thou say so ? I will wager thou art wrong.’

‘But he told me so an hour ago, silly boy.’

‘Oh !’

Willie was lost in thought : the ways of men and women were too deep a problem for such as he.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ladies of Princess Joanna's court were spinning in their chamber at the Tower Royal or Wardrobe, a castle near to the monastery of the Black Friars; the windows which gave upon the river were open, and a fresh air blew across from Paris Gardens and Horseley Down.

As her maidens span, the Princess read aloud :

'I can see,' she said, 'why the monks do so cry down Master Wyclif, for he is utterly against their mode of life. See ! he says : " What charity is it to a cunning* man to choose his own contemplation in rest, and suffer other men go to hell for breaking of God's hests, when he may lightly teach them, and get more thank of God in little teaching than by long time in such prayers ?" That is to speak without beating of the bush.'

'Madame,' said lady Sibyl, 'if I had to choose, me lievert† be a friar than a monk, for a friar can go about and teach.'

'Yea,' said another lady, 'and a friar can go abroad and see the naughty world ; and that is what Sibyl liketh.'

They all laughed—Sibyl, too ; for she made no false pretences.

* Learned.

† I would rather.

‘Wouldst be a limitour,† Sibyl?’

‘I would be aught rather than a sober Lollard,’ whispered the girl.

The Princess caught something of her meaning, and said :

‘Thou dost Dr. Wyclif wrong ; for he saith, “ I guess well that women may dance in measure, to have recreation and lightness.” ’

‘Lo ! madame, where there passeth in a wherry Dan John of Canterbury, the giant monk of Westminster, with one who weareth the Lambeth badge ; shall we call to them ?’

‘An it likes you. Heigho ! would that I could get you maidens to love serious things ; but I was young myself once—young and frivolous and light !’

‘And beautiful, madame,’ added Sibyl, dropping a curtsy.

The Princess tapped her with the book playfully, and shook her head.

‘John of Canterbury salutes the “ Fair Maid of Kent,” and begs to introduce his good friend, Master Standish, esquire to his Grace of Canterbury.’

‘Be seated, sirs ; ye are welcome—the more that I was conversing with my maidens on the world and its temptations.’

‘Ah !’ said the giant, with a twinkle of the eye ; ‘your princely highness suspecteth me of knowing more of the world’s temptations than becometh a regular.† I tell them they should make a jubilee‡ monk of me, and send me to play in the garden.’

* Limited to a certain district.

† Monk.

‡ One who had been monk fifty years.

‘Thou art more fitted for playing than praying, I greatly misdoubt,’ said the Princess, smiling as she raised a warning forefinger; ‘but I always say that I find in thee no irreligion, no fault in morals, only a boisterous, whimsical gaiety, innocent and thoughtless as a child that hath not been brought oft to the judicium.’*

‘Heaven, that hath blessed me with the body of Hercules, hath dowered me with all the mischief of Cupid.’

The maidens laughed to see the unwieldy giant affect the mincing air and strut of the little God of Love.

‘Thou shouldst ha’ been a mimic, Dom’nus John,’ said the Princess; ‘for thy skill lieth so quaintly in imitating of others.’

‘Yea, madame, I am passing humorous in all miracle-plays, and eke moralities. But my fellows say I spoil the piece: sith† if I play Noah, the ark must be three feet higher or I fetch the roof off with my head; or if I play Elijah or David or Judas Iscariot, the others look like puny children beside me, which liketh them not.’

‘We were talking about the monastic life, which did seem to us full indolent. Dost find it so?’

‘Indolent? never a moment of leisure for any save the seven playfellows, the jubilee monks. Up at all hours of the night for prayers; worked at all hours of the day when not praying—but I complain not, ladies. Work is a glorious thing to keep one healthy in body, mind, and soul, and God hath given no greater curse than wealthy idlesse.’

* Whipping-stool.

† Since.

‘There, girls! think on that. I often quote to them, Dan John, those lines of Robert Manning of Bourne, who, more than any other writer, hath taught us at the court how to speak the English tongue :

“Pray God first He give thee that meed,*
That thou may’st serve Him well in deed ;
If thou pray thus, and sithen well do,
So may’st thou come His mercy to ;
And not in idleness, as ye think,
Well to eat and well to drink.”’

Standish, who had been sitting ill at ease under the fire of so many ladies’ eyes, and only comforted himself by casting appealing glances at lady Sibyl, ventured to join in the talk.

‘Doth it not hap that the monk, who hath been kept out of all temptation in his cloister, more easily falleth a victim to Satan when he goeth abroad?’

Dan John opened his large brown eyes in dismay, and spread abroad his long fingers in deprecation, and with affected horror replied :

‘Oh, naughty squire! hast thou found me so soft to mould in the ways of sin? But, in sober sooth, monks go not abroad singly, but in pairs; that is one safe-guard; and . . .’

‘But,’ said Sibyl, ‘Master Standish (methinks) is neither monk nor friar, yet thou art found going abroad in only his company.’

‘Too true, lady. The rule hath been relaxed in my favour, partly because no brother loveth to be seen walking under my elbow, and partly because,

* Boon, reward.

were I civilly inclined to enter mead-house, tavern, or the like, my very magnitude should reveal to all men who I am. But, let me say, Master Standish is as sober and demure as the best monk.'

The ladies smiled to see the blush come on the squire's face.

'But it is not true that regulars cannot resist temptation; for the fact is that the foul fiend, who goeth about seeking whom he may devour, hath no power to see them that are clean of heart. Old Manning telleth us, in his "*Handlyng Sinne*," a story of a certain hermit who was so good and full of grace, that he could see spiritual things which worldly men might not see. He could discern, when he looked on the face of a man, whether that man were in deadly sin, or of good and holy life. It happed on a day that this same hermit came and leaned over the churchyard wall, and beheld the folk as they came in to hear divine service. As thus he mused, he took heed how two men came towards the gate, the one of whom seemed to him to be in chains, fast bound. Thereat he looked more narrowly, and saw that the other wight* was no mortal man at all, but a foul fiend, and he seemed to be holding back the man from coming to holy ground. Howbeit, the man did the rather prevail, and passed through the lych-gate; whereupon all his chains brast† in two and fell off—he entered the church a free man. But the fiend stood still by the gate, not daring to step within, and there did abide, tarrying for his man. Then the hermit, following the man into church, saw

* Person.

† Broke.

him kneel before the priest and confess his sins with tears of bitterness ; but when he was clean shriven* and assoiled,† the sinner went forth, and, though he passed close by the fiend, yet that foul wight saw him not, but still tarried by the gate, gaping vainly about him on all sides. When all were gone away, the hermit strode up to that fiend and, crossing himself divers times, said, "Traitor, for what need standst thou here ? Tell it me ; in God's name I conjure thee."

'Then made answer that glutton in this wise :
"I but tarry for my prisoner. Long hath he been under my hands. Indeed, I marvel much that he cometh not forth."

" "Benedicite !" said the hermit scornfully, "he passed close under thy very nose but now ; yet, because that he is clean shriven, thou hadst no power to mark him.

" "Now hie thee to hell where thou camest fro',
Ever to dwell in pain and woe."

The Princess looked round upon her ladies to see what effect this story had upon them. The chamber was hushed in a deep silence which none seemed willing to break.

'May He give us clean hearts, that we escape the eye of the tempter !'

As the Princess uttered these words in a low tone, a deep 'Amen' from Standish sounded from the other end of the room.

The Princess looked up.

* Given a penance.

† Absolved.

‘Ah! it is thou—the squire with whom I held strict parley in the chase at Eltham! I now remember thee. Sibyl, offer our guest some wine.’

Sibyl whispered to a page, ‘Go, fetch a cup of vernage or muscadel, and that leche-lombard that we bought yesterday.’ Then, turning to Mary de Molyneux, she whispered, ‘Now shall we test the love-charm which the old witch muttered over the jelly ere we bought it.’

Then, advancing with the wine and jelly to Standish, she dropped a curtsy demurely enough, which she belied by the wicked look in her eyes.

‘For the wine I thank thee, but the jelly I may not eat.’

‘Tis the best leche-lombard—jelly of cream, isinglass, honey and almonds.’

‘I thank it; I would eat not.’

‘But I would fain have thee eat, good Master Standish. Do taste it. Hark in thine ear! I made it with my own hands.’

This last recommendation was too much for Standish, who looked up trustfully into the siren’s smiling face, and murmured:

‘I can refuse nothing that comes from thee. Let me have it.’

The ladies of the court looked at one another, for they all knew the secret of the muttered charm; they watched Standish eat, and looked expectantly to see what he should say or do.

Sibyl sat beside him, and, as the monk conversed with the Princess, she contrived to ask him how he had sped with Carlotta. Had he fulfilled his pro-

mise of informing her how false was her love, Alured of Dene?

Standish shook his head. He had not told her, he said.

‘But I enjoined thee to do the girl this service—for her sake.’

‘Yea, fair lady; and I went to Langland’s house in Cornhill with that express purpose. But . . .’

‘“But!” Tell me, an thou lovest me, why thou hast refused my wish.’

‘Because the poor girl loved him so passionately, I could not bear to deal her so cruel a blow. I thought it better to try if I could make my friend more true to her and more worthy of her.’

‘Thou hast done the poor thing a grievous wrong,’ replied Sibyl, with a pettish air, glancing round at the same time to see if her companions were listening and aware of her discomfiture.

‘I know not how this may end, but I thought . . .’

‘Yea; but give me leave to tell thee, ye men wot not how to deal with women. This lass with the black eyes shall come to misery if she be not told at once how that her love is slighted. Come! go to her and give her this piece of gold, and that will dry all her tears, I’ll warrant it.’

‘I could not, lady. I could not be the marrer of her happiness, nor would I insult her by offering her money.’

‘What! is the chit so mis-proud? Sonties! how the hearts of the poor are exalted since the pest! Well, if thou wilt not tell her this truth for her sake’—here Sibyl unconsciously raised her voice—‘do it

for my sake. Thou shalt have *me* for thy dear guerdon,* an thou wilt do me this devoir.'

Sibyl brought all the witchery of smile and look and gesture to bear upon poor Standish ; she even pressed his hand with her own soft fingers.

But he, with a troubled frown and a deep sigh, made answer :

'Dearest lady, wouldst thou ask me to do some deed of derring-do,† to fight in my serk,‡ or meet the lions in the Tower, for thy love, I would adventure it ; but this thing that thou askest me may not be done. My conscience, which is lord over my heart, bids me refrain from putting this sely§ child to such shame and suffering.'

Sibyl's face grew dark. She thought to herself : 'Why, if I should ever wed this man, his spiced|| conscience should be the mar-plot of all my joys. But I will be his match yet.'

'Believe me, most lovely lady, I have never spoken to woman before as I speak to thee. I would hazard all but the grace of God in thy service.'

'It is not the grace of God I wish thee to hazard, but to question thy wisdom herein. However, let us speak no more of it now ; for all the maidens are lending an ear to our idle talk. But when thou hast learned to obey, I shall know thou hast learned what true love is.'

Standish looked the picture of misery. He rose to take leave, and murmured rather incoherently :

'Some of us be going to the great fair at Stour-

* Reward.

† Daring.

‡ Shirt.

§ Innocent.

|| Over-particular.

brigge, nigh to Cambrigge. What token shall I fetch thee thence ?'

Sibyl grew more gracious, and held him for full three minutes while she spake of kirtles of gold of Cyprus and flowered under-tunics of soie.

'And look to it,' she added, laughing, 'if thy friend of Dene buy aught for his maid in Cornhill, let it be in crying* colours.'

As the two men rowed home past the gardens of the Templars, now granted to the Hospitallers, Standish confided to his friend his dilemma about warning Carlotta, and asked his advice.

'Well-a-day!' cried Dan John, 'if thou wilt fall in love with such a foreweaned† child, thou must expect to go pipe in an ivy-leaf.'‡

'Be not all ladies of quality somedeal foreweaned, Dan John?'

'Thou dost well to consult with me, for I believe that there is ne'er a man of my inches kens more of fine ladies than I do.'

'Gramercy! and what thinketh your monastic wisdom?'

'Ask your father—ask good Father Simon of Sudbury.'

'“Tell never thy foe that thy foot acheth.” Not that his grace is my foe; but how can I tell him all my weakness, Dan John?'

'Because, not only is he full cunning among the “gentz de ley,”§ but under a rough outside he harboureth a kind heart.'

* Loud, violent.

† Be disappointed.

‡ Spoilt.

§ Lawyers.

‘I know it well. I would fain—I had liever*—shall I confess all to him, thinkest thou?’

‘Yea; Marie! ’tis thy plain duty to make a clean breast of it.’

Thus it was that Standish went back to Lambeth and confessed his difficulty to his Grace of Canterbury.

The Archbishop’s face had a faint smile playing upon it, and his thin lips quivered a little, as he sat upright in his red leather chair and watched the features of his favourite squire working in nervous trouble. At length he put his hand upon Standish’s head, who kneeled before him.

‘My son, is not this daughter of folly too gay for such as thou?’

‘It is written, my father, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.”’

‘Yea; for innocent mirth I have nought but praise. But this maid, I will mark her well when next I visit the Princess. Yet, from what thou tell’st me, I should say, speaking as a lawyer, “Enter into no covenants with such as are over-subtle;” and, as a priest, I would say, “My son, I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; enter not into the path of the wicked.” Now go and ask counsel of One who wotteth what is best for all.’

Standish went away sad at heart.

The Archbishop listened to his echoing footfall, and, as it died away down the long corridor, murmured aloud:

‘Poor fool! So he must get himself wounded by

* Rather.

a strange woman ! I had half a mind to tell him that the girl's pity for Carlotta was but feigned—as I half suspect that it was her love for Alured of Dene which prompted all this persuasion to warn the child. Dear heart ! what a world this is ! Sure some gibing fiend must have the control of human loves, or they would never fall out so perversely. Yea ; I was weak to let the poor stripling go undeceived. Well ! it shall be done—at a more convenient season. Needs must I now prepare my measures for the great Parliament which is to meet at Northampton on St. Martin's Day. May He prosper it to me as shall seem to Him best !'

The Angel of Death floated by and overheard that prayer. He stooped as though he would have kissed the old man's brow—and vanished.

CHAPTER XX.

THE first cool breezes of autumn were rustling amongst the leaves of Epping Forest on a bright September morning—very early in the month—and the hollows between the hills were traversed by the shadows of fleeting clouds, as a large cavalcade of mounted pilgrims came riding along the greenwood road with carolling and fluting and shouts of laughter.

Many of these were really going to visit our Lady of Walsingham, and some the rood of Bromholme, but the most part were bent on simply attending the great fair at Stourbridge.

They were a motley throng, journeying together for the sake of company, and safety from the outlaws of the forest and the disbanded soldiers who, since the close of the French wars, infested the wilder parts of the country. Monks sent as delegates from their convents to buy stores of lace and sheepskin, silk and horses, glass, and sheep of excellent breed ; friars of the four orders ; chantry-priests and guild-priests ; canons and beneficed clergy, adorned, some of them, with coloured robes and wide hanging sleeves and gloves, like the daintiest of the laity ; summoners and pardoners, with their bags full of indulgences brought hot from Rome ; the college manciple and

the town reeve; the steward of the feudal lord; and many a merry wife and maid, eager to mix pleasure with business; and with these a baser sort of mechanics and craftsmen, of tilers and carpenters, of millers and villeins, of serfs even, who had got leave from their lords to spend holiday. And the gaiety of these travellers flowed in jest and fabliau* and song. For the moment the grinding wheel of necessity was forgotten; for the moment they were free from the chains of social and political oppression; they took a lesson from the birds that sang above them and the rabbits that sported in the sandy glades, and, in a childlike abandon, laughed dull care away.

A pilgrimage! What a delightful holiday to the swinked† serf; to the craftsman, cribbed and confined the year round in smoky cabin; to the clergy, who might thus enlarge their views and meet the wise, the strong, and the wealthy, whom they had as yet only heard of! For all the East of England, with the Midland-folk, would be sure to jaunt to such a wondrous fair.

A pilgrimage like this was at once a national picnic, a religious service, and an unrivalled opportunity for buying the best of everything.

Many of these pilgrims had travelled far. Some of them wore the cross-keys and vernicle,‡ the badge of a Roman pilgrimage, sewn upon hat or shoulder; a few the white cross and palm, which told of a journey to the Holy Land; or the scallop-shell of Compostella; or the ampulla, the flask of lead,

* Anecdote.

† Tired.

‡ Portrait of our Lord, from the veil of Veronica.

which contained the miraculous liquid of St. Thomas of Canterbury. But to-day they were bent, first of all, on going to Stourbridge fair; and there was no indecorum in their noisy mirth, such as had stirred the indignation of Simon of Sudbury some years ago.

A smaller group were seen riding behind, but these, being better mounted, soon overtook the main body. In this last party were knights and squires, and ladies of high degree. Their bridles, set about with silver bells, jingled in the wind. As they passed the larger party, hats were doffed, and many a 'God save ye!' was heartily spoken. But there were other greetings less complimentary; and envious, grudging eyes glanced bitterly at the slashed doublets and pointed shoes and horned head-dresses of the nobles.

One boy in particular attracted attention by his costly robes and jewelled hat. He wore a tabard, or loose, sleeveless jacket, embroidered with the arms of England and France, and a chain of gold about his neck, from which hung a little harp of gold, set about with sapphires.

'Tis the King's own minstrel, and none other,' said one.

'Tis we who pay for all such mummary,' said another.

The boy overheard the remark, and, reining up sharply, said:

'If there be any grievance that the King can redress, let me know of it, and I shall presently speak with his highness.'

One of the knights rode up and whispered in the boy's ear, but he waved him off with a gesture of impatience.

‘Tush! John; let us hear what the ribalds have to say.’

There was no small stir amongst the company, for they perceived by the extravagance of their dress that the new arrivals were nobles of high estate. But when two tilers pressed forward and addressed the minstrel in bold language, all who were near kept silence to hear what they should say.

‘God save thee, young minstrel! and tell thy master, who haply wotteth not the condition of this kingdom, that folk be muckle wroth with them that make his laws.’

‘Gramercy! my fine fellow, but who art thou to arraign Ministers of State, forsooth?’

‘Men clepen* me Walter, tiler of Maidstone; and this my fellow is hight† John, tiler of Dartford.’

‘Two stalwart men, i’ faith; and what is your grievance?’

‘Englishmen will have no slavery, young master,’ said the Tiler of Maidstone; ‘let the young King know that! The lawyers are busy making nought of the letters of freedom which our fathers won, saying that we must work on the land, and if we go away we shall be branded on the forehead; we must work for the same wage that our fathers got before the pest, although the price of food has gone up so that it be all impossible to live thereon; and he who shall overpay us shall be fined forty pence.’

‘Is food, then, so much dearer since the great pest?’

‘Yea, that it is: eggs, which were a penny the

* Call.

† Called.



WAT TILER ARGUES WITH THE ROYAL MINSTREL.

hundred, are now fivepence; fagots, which were one shilling the hundred, are now three shillings; charcoal is half as dear again; in fact, everything that needs labour is doubled in price, because since the pest labourers are few.'

'Ah!' said one of the knights, interrupting; 'but that is a one-sided view. Food is dearer, but wages are higher. A carpenter now gets threepence a day, and in London fivepence. Women before the pest could be hired at a penny a day; now they fetch threepence. Reaping was fivepence before the pest; now 'tis tenpence. The main burden falls on the lord, for all that he has to sell is cheaper, such as horses, sheep, milk, cattle; whereas all he must buy is grown dearer, such as labour, horse-shoes (which are now a penny each); coat and hood now standing at tenpence; spurs at eightpence, lady's silk gown at two shillings and sixpence, sleeves for changing at fourpence. Why, my lord, give me leave to tell thee (in despite of what this ribald says) that the cost of a harvest, which before the pest was three pounds thirteen shillings and ninepence, is now twelve pounds nineteen shillings and tenpence.'

'What the proud earl saith is sooth,' said the Tiler; 'and if the Parliament would let things be, all should be well; but they leave the prices of things as they be, and they seek to lower the wages of the labourer—that is our cry. If we band together and agree to refuse a death-wage, they clepen it "the malice of servants in husbandry."'

The young minstrel looked puzzled; it was the first time, perhaps, that he had heard the labourers'

side of the question, and as the Tiler put it, the complaint seemed reasonable.

Just then they overtook others journeying on the same road—there were monks, knights, and esquires in the Canterbury livery and others. ‘The giant of Westminster!’ was the cry, as they saw John of Canterbury striding along on foot, resting his elbow carelessly on the crupper of a horse.

‘Whom are they cheering?’ asked the minstrel.

Some said ‘The giant,’ others ‘Long Will, the maker* of Cornhill.’

‘What! be yon tall clerk the maker of “Piers Plowman”?’ said the Tiler.

‘Even so, friend; but he has a shrewish voice for pilgrims. Thou kenn’st his lines, bitterly asked, of Piers:

“Kenn’st thou aught a cor-saint † that men call Truth?

Canst thou aught weten ‡ us the way where that wight dwelleth?”

to which the pilgrim replies:

“Nay, so me God help!

I saw never palmer with pike and with scrip
Ask after him, ever till now in this place.”

The Tiler went up to Langland and made him obeisance, saying:

‘Thou art the poor man’s friend; we all honour thee, and one day thou shalt have high honour and place in this land.’

Langland gazed at the speaker with a look in his dark eyes half sad, half humorous.

* Poet.

† Holy body.

‡ Inform.

‘Doth thy astrology teach thee that, friend Tiler? for such thou art by thy dress. Alas! Long Will’s reward is poverty and neglect.’

‘It shall not be so when we come into power,’ murmured the Tiler.

‘Another wretched craftsman driven mad by oppression and want,’ thought Langland to himself.

As they passed through the town of Ware, they raised the cry, ‘To Stourbridge fair! to Stourbridge!’ and those that would came forth of their houses and joined the company.

About two miles beyond Ware, as the road dipped down steep between two hills at a hamlet called Wade’s Mill, there was a ford across the river Rib, and there the cavalcade halted.

‘What meaneth this halt?’ cried one of the knights.

Just then one rode back to say that a certain knight-errant with his squires held the ford, challenging all who passed to joust with him on the sward by the mill.

Thereat arose no small laughter, that one in these days should be so romantic as to ape a fashion now somewhat musty.

But as the most part were tired, and the sward by the brimming river was soft, and the banks on the further side sloped upward, the cavalcade halted and horses were dismounted.

Already one knight had bit the dust before the doughty defender of the ford, and the roar which arose from the valley only excited the knight-errant to seek further meed of praise.

There was whispering among the young minstrel's train, and anon a gallant knight stepped forth, his squire carrying behind him helmet and spear. At the first encounter either splintered a lance. Two new lances, headed with a small coronal, since it was a joust à plaisance,* were handed to the combatants, and they turned their horses and met again at full speed. But the knight-errant aimed too true, for he struck the other on his visor and forced him backward off his horse.

'At this rate we shall never pass the ford with honour,' said a haughty knight. 'Who will adventure after two have fallen?'

'Sir Knight, there rideth in our company a squire of his Grace of Canterbury, who is unequalled for skill and strength of body.'

'Haste him hither if he can prove himself a gentleman of name and of arms.'

As the cry was raised, 'His grace's squire!' some ran to call Standish, who was talking with Wat the Tiler. At first he refused, but when the clamour became great he pushed his broad shoulders through the press, while a good-humoured smile lit up his features. Busy hands soon buckled on his harness of plate; anon he took his horse, patting it ere he mounted, and talking in his ear familiarly, dressed his shield, buckling it about his neck, and set lance in rest.

Then at the cry 'Let them go!' theyhurled together in the midst with a clang of armour, and amid the noise of trumpets and pipes.

* For the fun of the thing.

‘A good course ! each has broken his lance.’

‘Aye—and full on the helm, too. Splendidly ridden, both of ye !’

With rein and spur they had recovered their steeds, and after breathing them awhile, clashed together again.

This time the aim of both was equally true, but the horses shocked together so rudely that they fell, and both the champions, alighting on foot, drew their swords.

Standish’s green jupon, embroidered on a red ground, was much torn, and the knight-errant’s tabard was slit from top to bottom ; but neither had been wounded. When they drew sword the music ceased, for the play was becoming serious, and it was quite enough to sit and watch how the battle should be achieved.

Then was there foining and slashing, and so heavily did they hew with their swords that huge cantels* flew on the field, and blood began to flow.

‘Ah ! the knight-errant thrusts—that is against the law.’

There was a cry of ‘Shame !’ and two knights made in to separate them, but Standish said :

‘Let be. An he wish a trial à outrance, he shall have it heartily.’

So together again with thrust and cut, but with more of hacking and hewing than of fencing, so hot were they grown ; now fighting round and round, now resting for breath by the river-bank.

* Splinters.

At last Standish smote so heavy a blow on the knight's crest that he dropped on one knee, but the sword snapped asunder.

The first burst of applause suddenly changed to dismay when they saw Standish facing his opponent with no weapon but a broken sword. Then the errant-knight called out in a haughty voice :

'Thou art in my danger, whether me list* to slay thee or save thee ; and but† thou yield thee as overcome and recreant, thou shalt die.'

'Slay me, Sir Knight, an thou canst, for yield to thee as recreant I may not. I had liever‡ die than be so shamed.'

Thereat a mighty roar of applause burst forth, and many cried 'Shame!' on the knight. But he addressed himself again to battle, as though he would finish Standish at the first stroke.

But the squire, with foot and eye, kept a wary distance from the reach of the blade, and just when one great blow had come swashing down beside his left arm, he leapt of a sudden upon the knight, took him by the middle, as he had learned the trick from a dalesman of the North Country, and flung him heavily down with a wondrous rattle of harness, so that he could not move for the trouble to his head. Then Standish stooped and razed off the other's helmet, as though he would have cut off his head. But the knight sobbed forth in a hollow voice :

'I yield me! Grant me thy grace.'

'Yea,' said Standish, 'on condition that thou take this cognizance of mine, soaked in blood, unto a

* I choose.

† Unless.

‡ Sooner.

certain lady now abiding at the Tower Royal;' and he whispered the fair lady's name, and full courteously helped the knight to rise.

When the first flood of congratulations had been met and received in modest silence, Standish was aware of two knights plucking at his jupon.

'What is it, sirs? I am heated, and fain would be alone.'

'Thy bravery hath been noted, valiant squire, and we are sent to bid thee change masters by one who can brook no denial.'

'Ye are much mistaken, if ye think I would exchange the service of his Grace of Canterbury for that of the proudest earl.'

'No earl demands thy service. Be not over-hasty.'

'I shall not, ye may trow. Who, then, is this lord who . . .'

'The King!'

'The King? Ye do but jest, sirs; how should the King know me?'

'There he sits on his horse! Come and make your homage.'

The young boy, dressed as a minstrel, held out his hand, saying:

'Kiss not, but grasp as an equal, for I would be unknown of this rabblement; gentle squire, so soon as thou canst crave leave from thy master, come to the Tower and thou shalt be enrolled amongst my household guard. It likes me to have such sturdy henchmen about me.'

Standish bowed low and murmured some words of

thanks ; but, indeed, he was faint with his wounds, and the folk swam before his eyes. When he recovered his senses he found himself lying on the river-bank, and a young girl was binding a wet compress about his shoulder.

He gazed dreamily upon her young face, a peasant girl, pretty, with hazel eyes and wavy brown hair, and a healthy cheek, bronzed.

‘Who art thou, sweet child, who tenderest me thus softly?’

‘I am Merswynde, daughter of John Tiler, of Dartford. Art stronger, noble sir? Some of them—my father and thy friends—stay for us yonder within call. Shall I cry “Ho!” and summon thy steed?’

‘Not yet—a few moments more, pretty minikin. Thy father must be a proud man to have a child so winsome. He should keep a watchful eye on thee, child—a watchful eye. The world is so stark and cruel, child—so full of unruly men.’

Standish sighed as he passed his hand over her fair brow.

‘Nay, master, fear not for me. None shall harm the kinswoman of Wat Tiler.’

CHAPTER XXI.

THE cavalcade got rather separated by reason of there being no large town on their route where they could all be lodged.

The King and the better sort were received in cells, or branch houses of the great monasteries, especially those of St. Albans and St. Edmunds Bury ; some craved admission into the guest-chamber of the parsonage houses which they passed, while the most part spent the night in the open forest, singing themselves to sleep round the crackling fires, or telling stories of ghostly visitors between the fitful glimpses of the moon.

On the morrow they were up betimes, each party uttering aloud the cry, ' God speed our way to Stour-bridge fair ! ' so that no sleep-worn traveller should be left behind to the wild boars or the bandits of the forest.

Ever and anon they came upon a cultivated patch, and the hayward, or guard of enclosure, would warn trespassers to keep to the forest track. Now they would come across a gay party of fowlers, who with hawk on wrist were seeking heron or duck in the reedy fens ; sometimes the King's foresters would ride by, scowling on the lewd folk as though they had been slaves. For these lords of the forest had much

scorn for those who lived on trencher-bread and penny ale.

Once and again they came upon a party of canons of the Church, with priors and beneficed clergy mounted and apparelled for hunting. Then would Langland's face grow dark, and he would mutter as to himself :

‘They mote on hunting with dog and bitch,
And blowen horn and crien Hey !
And sorcery usen as a witch,
Such keepen evil Peter's key.’

‘Good-morrow, Master Squire,’ said John Tiler of Dartford to Standish, as he rode alongside in the forest ; ‘be thy shoulder easier the morn ?’

‘I thank it, the scratch is easier ; yet have I some coil to move this arm. But, in sooth, I have to thank thy little maid for her so skilful tendance.’

‘Merswynde be somedeal subtle in physic and surgery, I trow.’

‘Yea ; and I tell her that when she is minded to wed, and hath set the bridal ale a-brewing, I shall be ready to buy as many gallons as she will.’

‘That is fairly spoken, good sir. I would all our young nobles were even as thou. But where is my little maid ? for I see her not.’

At that moment Standish, looking around, caught sight of Alured with his arm round Merswynde's neck, as though he were offering her a kiss.

Clapping spurs to his horse, he galloped up to them, shouting :

‘Ho ! there, little maid, thy father craves thy presence ! Haste—haste away !’

‘Why needst thou step in and spoil good sport?’ said Alured moodily.

‘For two reasons—nay, for three. First, I would spare the child all fear of shame, for she hath used me with much kindness; secondly, I would spare Mistress Carlotta further heartaches on the score of thy gallantry; thirdly, I would spare thee a sound flogging at the hands of this stout carle, her father, or the starker Tiler of Maidstone, who is, I ween, her kinsman.’*

‘Thou shouldst have been a pardoner, friend Standish, thy tongue runs so glibly on firstly and secondly. I wonder thou dost not climb into a pulpit and preach and nod to the people, as Master Chaucer saith, for all the world like an old pigeon becking and nodding on a barn-roof.’

‘He wise is that ware is. Thy flouts and sneers shall not affright me from what his grace teacheth us is the first devoir of a true knight—to guard the purity and innocence of woman.’

‘Benedicite! if she be a lady of rank and quality, I am with thee; but this little thing—what worth is she?’

‘As precious in God’s eyes as thou or I, or the greatest lady in the land.’

‘By my father’s soul! where hadst thou such doctrine? Oh, I see! trafficking with Long Will and these scurvy Tilers and idle Lollards hath made of thee a malignant. Much do I wonder the young King should set so dangerous a man near his person.’

* There were four Tilers prominent in the revolt—Wat Tiler of Essex, Wat Tiler of Maidstone, John of Dartford, and a Will Tiler.

Standish waited to hear no more, but rode on to more congenial company. Soon after this Alured, thinking to get some sympathy from Dan John, a monk so merry of cheer, confided to him how Standish had spoilt his little innocent play with the pretty maid; but the look that came into the giant's eyes, and the terrible grip which he took of Alured's arm, were sufficient to prove to him that he had come to the wrong man.

'Much do I fear thou art nought but a light-headed ninny—just a poor, light-headed ninny!' The tone was so mocking and so pitiful, that all the blood rushed into Alured's face; but he could do nothing, for Dan John had got his sword-arm as in a vice, and he was obliged to listen. 'Come, forsake these parlous ways, ere a worse thing hap. Dost not believe that God liveth? that Heaven can and will take vengeance on all craven sinners? Remember thee on Sir John Arundel and his men, who, only last year, thought it a fine thing to sack a nunnery in Brittany, and were taking away full sixty of the maidens whom they found there. Well, a muckle storm came in the night. Arundel, in terror, cried, "Throw them over! throw them overboard! 'Tis because we have violated the brides of Christ!" And they cast them into the sea—all of them. But that did not save the ships. For they foundered before day broke—twenty-five ships—and every soul was lost.'

'Ha! but to my thinking, if that was the doing of Providence, the nuns came full as badly off as the naughty soldiers.'

‘Hark! a word in thine ear!’ and the giant hissed these words in Alured’s ear so fell and gruesome, that his cheek blenched* with fear. ‘There’s a something after death—a paradise for the good, but a place of torment, foul and horrid as hell, for them that repent not.’

Alured went away discomfited; but ever the words of his father kept coming into his head, which the old man said to him when he left home:

‘Alured,’ quoth he, ‘the good fowler will not throw a falcon at every fly.’

He resolved, then, to walk more warily; but, as hap would have it, towards the eventide, when now they were not far from Cambridge, Merswynde’s mule cantered off with her into the thicket, and she, trying to escape being crushed against the smooth bole of a great beech, threw herself off with a little cry. Alured, who had kept his eyes on her from a distance for some time, rode up, and was helping her to regain her feet, when Wat Tiler of Maidstone rushed in, and, mistaking what he saw, felled Alured with one stroke of his iron fist.

Those of the travellers who saw the occurrence cried out, and the news soon came to the ears of Standish and his party.

Wat Tiler had taken out his knife, shouting aloud:

‘So perish all who touch one of England’s daughters!’

But as his hand was uplifted to strike, it was caught and held. The Tiler tried to turn and face

* Paled.

his new assailant, but Standish—for it was he—twisted the man's wrist and caused him so much agony, that he was fain to go forward whither he was thrust and then be flung face downwards among the bracken.

'Forgive this roughness,' said Standish, as the big man rose to his feet; 'it was the only way I could save thy soul from the guilt of murder.'

Wat Tiler stood glaring at Standish. He would have struck at him if he had dared, but the feat of yesterday had shown Standish to be a very dangerous opponent. Still he muttered dire threats.

Standish was standing with his hand on the hilt of his sword.

Just now the tall monk pressed in, and, catching Wat Tiler by the arm, he said:

'No, no, no, no, no! my bonny man, trust thyself to me. I fear no knight nor squire in England. See, I shall carry thee securely off to bed.'

So, laughing like a merry schoolboy, he whipped up the Tiler in his arms and carried him off as though to his nurse, while the folk screamed with laughter to see how the legs of the reluctant churl kicked and struggled in mid-air.

Thus a seeming tragedy was turned into a comic farce; but Wat of Maidstone never forgot the injury he thought he had received, and when next he and Standish met it ended in a tragedy, sad indeed.

But now they were approaching the 'Lammas,' as the great field was called, wherein were gathered the tents and booths and stalls of the traffickers who came to Stourbridge Fair.

The young King and his suite rode on to Cambridge, which lay hard by; for there would he find better lodging for himself and his retinue, paying for the same, not in good broad pieces (shame be it spoken!) but in tallies—little white sticks cut into with notches which signified how much the King's exchequer should pay, but which the common folk found very hard to get cashed.

But Standish and Alured preferred to lie in the open heath, within the tents which their own sumpter-mules had brought; for they had much to do for his Grace of Canterbury in common with Peter the manciple, who had especial charge of the purchases in wax and spices, and all such dainty wares as could be gotten of the Venetian and Genoese merchants; while to Standish and Alured in special was entrusted the buying of chargers, and mules, and falcons, and armour of proof, for his grace's knights and esquires.

As the two latter sauntered through the fair on the evening of the first day—it being the 8th of September—Standish said:

'Thou dost bear me no ill grudge, I hope, Alured, for my plain dealing with thee in the matter of little Merswynde, the Tiler's daughter?'

Alured blushed like a damoiselle chidden of her mother, and, after some silence, took Standish by the arm, and said:

'Thou art a good fellow, John, and by God's help I shall amend my ways, forswear all light gallantry, and—and . . .'

'Cleave to the maiden to whom thy troth is plighted, thou wouldst say.'

‘My troth? Nay, I have not gone so far as to plight my troth to any.’

‘What! not to the sweet Carlotta? Oh, Alured!’

‘’Twere as good as to say, “Go, spoil thy fortune,” as to say, “Go, wed the daughter of the mean clerk, Will Langland.” I tell thee, we have never been betrothed by priest or friar in Holy Church.’

‘There are some promises which are as much binding on a good knight, such as thou wouldst one day be, as though they had been sanctified by the Church.’

‘Alway preaching to me in the same strain. Thou intendest well, I trow; but it irks me to have my duty thrust down my throat as it were with a mailed glove. I love Carlotta dearly, better, in good sooth, than any other maid, and if thou couldst get influence with the King to have her made a lady by right, there is none I would sooner wed.’

Standish gave a little sigh, but he replied cheerily:

‘A bargain! I love Carlotta’s father well enough to wish him promotion, and I admire his genius, next to Master Chaucer’s, above all makers of song and verse, so that thou mayst count on me for thy sake, and his, and the poor love-lorn maiden’s, to do my best devoir to raise her and her father.’

At this Alured grew full merry and mirthful, rallying his friend on his shyness in storming the citadel of Sibyl’s affection, and going on to picture in glowing terms how, after he had married Carlotta, he should live like a vavasour* in the country, keep a table dormant,† and have an aerie of falcons second to none.

* Small lord.

† Always spread.

‘And there would my sweet lady Carlotta sit on the daïs beside me, while our tenants and household should feast every day at the long board that goeth down the hall, until Dame Carlotta should rise and stick her knife hard in the table, whereby we should all know that there was no more meat in the house ; and ’twould be excellent sport for us young men to hie out into the forest with bow and crossbow, hawk and hound, for to furnish her ladyship’s larder anew.’

So chatting they picked their way through the great throng that was idly surging between the booths ; it was growing to dusk, and torches and flambeaux and cressets set high on poles flared through the darkness, and set all the gay accompaniments of the fair in high relief against the shadowy distance. Here were Hanse-men, praising their bow-staves, their furs and copper ; there Lombard exchangers, their tables chinking with pollards and gold florins, with nobles and bezants, with Venetian leonines and Austrian zechins ; again they would jostle against some Genoese merchant, rich in silks and velvets ; or the burghers of Ghent and Bruges would loudly vaunt their delicate lawn and holland. And again, the coarser cries from the meat-stalls would salute their ears, and they would be invited to buy ribs of beef, or Essex cheeses, or pewter-pots of ale five days old, while an undertone of harp, pipe and sawtrie made the confusion greater ; and fripperers would beg them to deal in second-hand clothes, waferers would press comfits and cakes upon them, cutlers from Sheffield were ready with their

well-known panade, or Sheffield whittle, glovers had the choicest of gloves for them, embroidered in silk, or jewelled, if you will—what a gracious gift to carry to fair lady! But 'twere tedious to recount how many precious wares might be had for the money. There was the famous scarlet cloth of Lincoln, besides the Lincoln and the Kendal green, the burnet of Beverley, the linen of Lewes, the St. Albans bread, the ale of Ely, the Cambridge eels, and fur from distant Chester; then there were fine sheets of cloth of Rennes, not for everyone's pocket; swords of Saracen workmanship, richly inlaid with arabesques of silver and gold; kirtles broidered about with gold of Cyprus; long pointed shoes of Cracow, with silver chains to lace the point to the knee; Spanish paltocks; vests without sleeves, and laced to the hose by various strings of silk; high riding-boots of morocco from Cordova, and many an uplandish fashion which should tempt weak human nature to waste her substance. Among such temptations moved John Standish and Alured Dene on this first evening of their presence at Stourbridge fair, dividing their attention between the marvels of art and the medley of foreigners, whom trade or curiosity had brought thus strangely together.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was early on the morrow when a man dressed in the livery of the Corporation of Cambridge pushed his way into the tent occupied by Standish and Dene, and cried :

‘ Anyone here hight* John Standish, squire to his Grace of Canterbury ?’

‘ Yea, marry ! my good fellow, that there is,’ replied Standish, turning round from the breakfast which he was preparing. ‘ What lackest thou ?’

‘ Thou art bidden of the Mayor of Cambridge to the Court of Pie Powder.’

‘ The Court of Pie Powder ! Here, Alured, wake up, and get off thy straw. This scurvy varlet hath come to bid me to what he calls the Court of Pie Powder. Ha, ha !’

‘ Scurvy or no scurvy,’ said the man, scowling, ‘ it shall be no “ Ha, ha !” to him who shall be judged and condemned.’

‘ Why ! the lurdanet† means the Court of Pied Poudreux, dusty foot,’ said Alured, rubbing his eyes sleepily, and yawning twice.

‘ Yea ; that’s it, my masters. The court which presides over all questions of law and order connected with Stourbridge fair.’

* Called.

† Lout.

‘And I am bidden of the Mayor?’ said Standish, sitting down to his meal.

‘In an hour from now, by the great booth in the horse-fair.’

‘Good! I am always for law and order; I shall be there.’

The fellow turned to go, but as he lifted the canvas he thrust his dark face in again and growled out:

‘’Twould be better for thee if thou shouldst obey laws, and not make them.’

The two squires were puzzled; nor could they guess wherein they had offended. However, Standish thought it prudent to take with him some witnesses to character, for justice was prompt in those days—and injustice prompter.

So he and Alured called on Dan John, the monk, and together they proceeded to the big booth where sat the Mayor of Cambridge, in his robes of state, doing swift justice to the ribalds of the night past.

‘Call up Master Standish, squire to his Grace of Canterbury,’ cried the usher.

‘Here am I,’ said John, stepping forth with his smiling, dimpled cheek and strong, confident air.

‘Where is the accuser?’ said the mayor.

‘Here!’

The voice came from the throng of coystrels,* friars, hucksters, and jongleurs,† who filled the lower hall.

‘Step up, man, and give the court thy name and style.’

‘John, the tiler of Dartford.’

* Grooms.

† Minstrels and tale-tellers.

‘Thy ground of accusation, fellow?’

The mayor looked round approvingly at the two squires; for their presence compared favourably with that of the rude and scowling tiler.

‘On our road hither, may it please your honour, that tall young gallant in the slashed doublet, who spends his father’s wealth in buying rich jerkins, jagged and dagged, ounded and paled and . . .’

‘Stray not from the question,’ cried the mayor; ‘less art and more matter.’

‘I will come to it anon. Yon misproud caitiff forced my daughter from her selle,* and when my kinsman, Wat of Maidstone, came to her rescue, yon other stout carle struck in and gave our Wat so stark a fall that he keeps his bed the morn.’

‘This is a serious brawl, my masters,’ said the mayor. ‘What have ye to say in defence? Have ye any true jurymen who can swear from eye-witness that what he saith is false?’

Alured replied:

‘Let him produce his daughter. I trust her honour. She shall explain that I was but helping her when she was falling.’

‘Is thy child present?’ said the mayor.

‘She may not come, for she is alto forewearied and sick of heart.’

‘Let him produce his brother,’ said Standish, ‘who he saith is hurt by the fall. I did but thrust him face downwards into a bramble-bush, when he was lightly carried off by my young friend here.’

John pointed to the giant monk, who had been

* Saddle.

sitting on the floor, but who now rose and smilingly saluted the mayor.

The mayor looked up into the long, humorous face, and could only utter :

‘Bencite! how old art thou?’

‘One year and six months, by the striking clock in Westminster; and have cut all my teeth.’

The solemn tone and uplifted eyes, showing a large amount of white, made so comical a display that the whole court was convulsed with laughter.

‘And didst thou carry off yon carle for safe keeping?’

‘Under my arm, may it please thee. But I would this frivolous case were ended, for I have not yet finished all my bottle.’

A fresh burst of laughter disconcerted the mayor.

‘Art thou the famous Dan John, monk of St. Peter’s, at Westminster?’

‘I am he. When they let me out of the nursery I am not wont to trot so far from my cradle. I pray thee, dismiss the case. It is pure nonsense—anyone with half an eye could see . . .’

‘Silence!’ said the judge, who felt that his dignity must be asserted. ‘Do I gather that thou believest no real harm was meant or done?’

‘Anyone with half an eye . . .’

‘Silence! Dan John. Didst thou see the whole affair?’

‘With half an eye; for at my age I am apt to doze off unless nurse pats me on the back. When I am grown up, good Master Mayor, I shall take things more seriously. But, in sooth, anyone with half . . .’

‘Adone, adone! Dismiss the case. I see very well . . .’

‘With half an eye,’ broke in the monk, feigning to doze off.

‘Call the next case. The prosecutor hath produced no witnesses; he must beware how he walks, or the court shall amerce him.’

‘May baby go?’ said Dan John; and on receiving a nod of assent he went hopping and skipping from the presence of the judge, like a little child sped from his nurse’s arms.

‘Why all that tomfoolery?’ said Standish, as they stood outside.

‘Look hither, my dear knave,’ said the giant; ‘it is my policy to seem to be a doting fool. This is the case. There is to be a meeting of the Commons to-morrow after sext,* when that noted preacher, John Ball, shall deliver one of his harangues. I want to hear it. If they thought I was as wise as I am big, they would drive me off the field; but now, they will only shrug shoulders and say: “Poor Dan John, let him come in—a mere sucking fool, who shall do us no harm.”’

‘I, too, would hear this same firebrand,’ said Standish.

‘Nothing easier. Leave it to me. I will disguise thee as a witch. Pooh! nothing would suit thy complexion better. Leave it to me. I will dress thee bravely to play thy part. Thou shalt learn a few spells, such as, “Lo! how I crouch† thee from elves and from wights,” and anon, “Suffer me to say the night-spell on the four halves of thy door, fair sir, and on the threshold; then shall no fairy take thee.” Come thy ways!’

* The sixth hour after dawn.

† Cross.

Accordingly, on the next afternoon, they fared forth to the field in which John Ball was to speak his stirring words.

Standish, who had refused to be disguised as a witch, came in the dress of a Franciscan friar, in gray gown and knotted cord and bare feet; while Will Langland thought himself warranted to go without disguise, seeing that the Commons had ever his verses on their lips, and Ball himself would quote largely from the vision concerning Piers Plowman.

It was strange to see how many gaunt faces softened into tearful enthusiasm as the preacher was seen to be riding towards them on his white pony. Ball was habited from head to foot in black; his hood was drawn over his head; round his waist was a girdle of leather, which held up a gipsire or large purse on his left side. His face was thin, and his brow careworn, but there was a look of resolute daring about his mouth, which explained how it was that this poor priest of St. Mary's in York could persist in courting death or danger after being twice imprisoned by Simon of Sudbury, who had released him, as some thought, with fatal good-nature.

The motley throng of serfs and villeins, guilds-men and burghers, craftsmen, disbanded soldiers and Lollards, gave a low hum of applause as he dropped the reins upon his horse's neck, and began to speak:

“When Adam dalf and Evē span,
Who was then the gentleman?”

That shall be my text, good people.’ Then, raising his clear voice in ringing tones, and with fiery look,

he cried, 'Good people, hear me! Things shall never go well in England so long as goods be not in common, and so long as there be villeins and gentlemen. For consider, by what right are they whom we call lords greater folk than we? On what grounds have they deserved it? Why do they hold us in serfage? Answer me, men of Anglia, if ye can. If we all came of the same father and mother, of Adam and Eve, how can they say or prove that they are better than we, if it be not that they make us gain for them by our toil what they spend in their pride? They are clothed in velvet, and are warm in their martens' fur and ermine, while we are covered with rags. They have wine and spices and simnel* bread, we only oat-cake and straw, and ditch-water to drink. They have leisure and fine houses of stone, we have aches and pains and labour, the rain and the wind in the fields. And yet it is of us and of our toil that these misproud men hold their state. We are cleped† slaves; and if we do not perform our services we are beaten about the head; nor have we had any king to whom we could make our plaint, or who was willing to hear us and do us justice. Let us go anon to King Richard, who is a boy, and let us remonstrate with him on our serfdom; let us tell him we must have it otherwise, or we will find a remedy for ourselves.'

At these words a loud shout was raised, 'Let us seek the young King! He will hearken to our piteous cry.'

'Master Langland,' said Standish in an undertone, 'what think'st thou of all this coil and tumult?'

* Rich cake of the finest flour.

† Called.

‘Alas! ’tis very lamentable indeed, and my heart bleeds for the silly sheep. Their cry hath reason, for the lords are everywhere trying to bring again under bondage those who have paid for their freedom. But, though their need be great and their wrongs grievous, I much misdoubt whether they are not running down a steep place into the sea of misery by heeding the voice of this visionary preacher crying in the wilderness.’

‘Why, they do say he is for having all things in common, even wives.’

‘Nay; there they slander John Ball, for I have heard him in London insist earnestly on the sacredness of marriage. He would have the King or the State resume all the land, and deal out fairly to all—a strange, impossible notion, but one born of generous instincts. He would have the poor pay no tithes, and priests’ vows not irrevocable.’

‘They say he hath preached for twenty years up and down the country.’

‘Aye, and hath seen the inside of more than one prison.’

‘His Grace of Canterbury did put him in ward when he was Bishop of London. He excommunicated Ball, and avowed him no priest.’

‘Hence his bitterness against Simon of Sudbury. Mark how the simple folk press round him to kiss his hand, or even the hem of his raiment! Alas and weylaway! to think that poor folk are singing of my poor lines, and that my indignant cry should be helping them to rise in rebellion against their betters!’

‘But certes they shall not carry it so far.’

‘I much fear the outcome of all this going to and

fro of Lollards and disbanded soldiers, full of French notions and Flemish discontent ; for there hath been no small stir abroad of late—what with the Jacquerie and the white hoods.’

‘Dost repent, then, of what thou hast written, Master Langland?’

‘Not so. I wrote the truth, as I saw it ; but I spared not the idle ploughman nor the vicious craftsman. I lashed all impartially, whoever seemed to be doing the devil’s work. And thou mayst take it for proved that there is devil’s work a-doing, not only in tavern and mead-house, but in many a great lord’s castle—aye, and close to the young King himself. God shield us ! I see no way out of this but by blood and suffering.’

‘Thou art too gloomy a prophet,’ answered Standish, drawing him away from the crowd. ‘What can these unarmed caitiffs do against the most puissant knights in Christendom ? Bencite ! we should scatter them like sheep at the first charge !’

‘We shall see ! we shall see !’ muttered Long Will, shaking his head dolefully ; and, letting his deep, bass voice descend in a minor key, he chanted :

“‘ Lordings ! there are enough of you.
Of gentlemen there are but few.’”

‘’Twas a saying of old Manning of Bourne, was it not ?’ said Standish. ‘Still, let us remember the old proverb, “When bale is next, then boot is next.”* God can bring boot out of bale.’

‘Very true, dear boy, very true ; we must cherish a deeper faith and trust.’

* When evil is at its height, then good is nearest.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STOURBRIDGE fair lasted three weeks; but the chief part of the serious trafficking was done in the first fortnight, pleasure and carolling gradually gaining upon the bargains of the gray-beards as the weeks wore on. Standish and Dene left the manciple and Archbishop's reeve to conclude the purchases, and hastened to join their master, who was about to journey to Northampton, where Parliament was to be held, much against the wishes of the citizens of London; for the spot was held to be inconvenient by reason of there being no large accommodation for man and horse.

Hence the two squires hurried off with but slight escort to join Sudbury's cavalcade; they were the less inclined to tarry at Stourbridge, as the ladies whom they favoured had not attended the fair. Carlotta had been promised a place among his grace's women, but when the time had come Langland had shaken his head and said:

'Pilgrimages and fairs and miracle-plays are not seemly for young women. Carlotta shall bide with her mother.'

And Dame Langland had wiped her eye, and gained somewhat in the girl's affections by lamenting over her disappointment.

'It is all along of those sheepskins, depend on't, Lottie. Thy father would have thee slave over his jangling lines till crack of doom. I have no opinion of his Piers Plowman, who seemeth to me to be no better than an idle lurdane; why, lass, at thine age I was married to thy father.'

'Mother,' said Carlotta, bending over her manuscript to hide the blush, 'I would thou shouldst not talk of marrying. I have thee and father and little Willie to tend. In doing these duties I am full merry and glad.'

'It is a good wench thou art,' said the dame, flicking several sheets of manuscript into the straw with her dusting-clout.

'There, now! I be sorry for the trouble! Plague on these scribbling clerks!—for they toil hard for no boot or profit. Now, had I wedded with the brave young fletcher* who courted me . . .'

'Hush! mother, hush! no treason against the good man, I prythee. 'Twere shame to speak ill of one so true, so kind, so rich in great thoughts and high purposes. Believe in him, mother; for, as Master Chaucer saith, he shall be one of England's wise men.'

'Humph! Doth Master Chaucer so speak him fair? 'Tis generously said for one that is a maker of verses himself. But, in sooth, Dan Chaucer was ever a right merry gentleman. He is not one who would give a goose and charge for the garlic—not he! Whatever Dan Chaucer saith or doth is full generous. Did he say Long Will should get a benefice by his scribbling, sweet wench?'

* Arrow-maker.

‘ He promises to speak for father to Duke John of Gaunt ; and he told me how that he had limned* father in a poem he was making, and he quoted the lines, just hitting off poor father’s whims with such kindly mirth. None could take offence—’twas thus :

“ For him was lievert† had at his bed’s head
Twenty bookès, clothed in black and red
Of Aristotle and his philosophy,
Than robès rich or fiddle or sawtrie.”

And again :

“ All that he spake it was of high prudence,
And short and quick and full of great sentence,
Sownynge in moral manner was his speech,
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.”

There, mother, is not that just our Master Langland all over ?’

‘ Well-a-day, child ! I greatly misdoubt him as to his being so glad to learn. I never could teach him any good reason in husbandry.’‡

It was from such disparaging comments that Carlotta had to defend her beloved father’s character, while she toiled laboriously over his poem—copying, and sometimes illuminating with rare skill, whenever any rich convent gave an order for the book. But, to do Dame Langland fair justice, she never ran her husband’s reputation down before others. Out of her own house she lifted up his name in extravagant praise ; and Carlotta would smile to herself over her long and lonely work, and say softly to herself :

* Drawn.

† He would rather have.

‡ Economy.

‘Poor mother! it is her way of trying to creep closer to my heart—she must beat dear father’s image down a little, or she feareth he shall wax so great in my affections that she shall be forgotten. Dear heart! she loveth him, for all her shrewd tongue.’

As Standish and Dene rode through the forest-land of the East of England, they marked how the clearings had been suffered to fall into waste through want of hands to till the ground. For the recurring pest, the Black Death, had robbed the fields and towns of fully one-third of their inhabitants. Everywhere stood decay and ruin, and on men’s faces sat the shadow of a great discontent. When they emerged from the forest into land which had once been arable, they found all turned to grass, and sheep feeding where of late the harvest had smiled. Instead of a score of merry churls tossing up the sheaves into creaking wains, they saw the solitary shepherd tending his master’s lean flock. The fields, too, were beginning to be fenced off by hedges, to keep the sheep from straying, and it was no longer possible to ride at discretion over the open country, as it had been.

‘A pest upon these fenced fields!’ cried Alured, as his horse stumbled in a deep rut; ‘when the roads are so bad, it is a shame one cannot ride where one liketh.’

‘Yea; a good road is a traveller’s friend, but a foul road maketh travel more painful than no road at all. However, we shall soon go into the forest again, where a man shall ride where he listeth.’

They floundered on through the deep mud and rotten lanes with tightened rein and shouts of encouragement; while ever and anon the poor jaded horse would stop and put nose to ground, testing by smell or touch the safety of the quivering morass. Then would follow a plunge, a jingling of bells, a shout from the rider, and the deep breathing of the charger as he paused before attempting another slough.

As they laboured along through the greenwood, one of the men-at-arms rode up and called the attention of the squires to two men who, with arquebus in hand, were keeping pace with them on a parallel line.

‘Ride to them, Dickon, and ask where we may find lodging for the night.’

Presently Dickon returned with one of the foresters, who said:

‘Give ye good den! My master is encamped not far off; turn directly to the left with me, and I will bring you to a small lodge in the forest.’

Standish thanked him, and gave orders to follow the forester, though Dickon shook his head dubiously, and said to one of his companions in arms:

‘It fears me we are putting ourselves into the hands of outlaws. Why, when I rode anear those knaves, one of them fettled* him to shoot, but the other put hand on his arm and whispered him, “Hold.” If they be not Robert’s-men,† then I will never play cross and pile‡ again.’

Suddenly they rode into an open glade in the

* Made ready.

† Robbers.

‡ Pitch and toss.

forest, where the ground was high and firm, and the tall bracken gave promise of a soft couch for the night. There they saw a fire lit and an iron pot hung over the red blaze ; a goodly savour, as of some toothsome venison, came to the senses of the riders.

When Standish saw the deserted fire, and horses picketed about under the trees, he drew rein and called a halt, for he feared a surprise. But his caution came too late : for from every side of the glade ran forth the outlaws, bow in hand ; while their leader cried to the new-comers that they should have a welcome if they listed.

So Standish and Dene found their bridles seized, and themselves in the power of the bandits, almost before they had thought of making resistance.

As they were making for the camping-ground by the fire, a loud exclamation of joy from his friend surprised Standish.

‘ Who would have thought of such a thing, John ? ’

‘ Marry ! what cheer ? ’

‘ Why ! blessed saints defend us ! the leader of these free foresters is none other than my own elder brother ! ’

Thereupon Standish was presented to the outlaw chief, a tall, fair man, scarce turned thirty-five, who offered his hand and bade them a right merry welcome to his supper ; while the swarthy faces grinned with amusement at finding how near of kin was he whom they were but now ready to shoot down.

When the horses had been seen to, they all lay on the bracken by the fire, and choice morsels of savoury

venison were dealt round to the visitors, who ate with the greater relish as the good fare was so unexpected. When appetites had been somewhat appeased, and the cold monosyllabic grunts had begun to thaw into freer speech, Alured pressed his brother for news :

‘Something thou hast told me in whispered talk, but I would have thee tell my friends here how thou camest to be outlawed in the forest instead of living on our father’s land.’

So spake Alured, and the ruddy glow of the wood-fire shone on many a lifted face, eager to hear once more the story of the chief’s wrongs.

Leofric of Dene, thus appealed to, threw a faggot on the blaze, and began in a low voice, which gathered strength and volume as he went on, stirring his listeners as only men can be stirred by a tale who have never had clerkly learning enough to read the written word.

‘Alured and I were both sons of one father whose land lay beside the forest of Epping. Our father had an elder son, by an earlier marriage, to whom he spake thus on his bed of death :

“Son,” said the doughty old knight, “now that death doth handle me full sore, fain would I dress my land amongst my three sons, that each of them shall have equal share.”

“Yea, father,” said John, “I pledge myself to see thy quest carried out.”

‘And anon the old man lay stone-still and could no more. Alured was sent out as page to his Grace of Canterbury ; I tarried with my brother in the old

hall. A year went by, but never a word was spoken of our share in the land; only I marked how my elder brother grew ever more curst* and fell with me, bidding me do menial service for him. At last I brake out in wrath, saying:

“Do it thyself, I will not be thy cook; never yet have I taken heed of the harm thou hast done me and Alured; our parks be to-broken, and our deer reft away, our armour and our steeds—all goeth to shame; and, therefore, have thou God’s curse, brother,” quoth I in a passion of wrath.

‘But John, he looked into my eyne, and seeing something there he would not meet, he turned him to his men and said:

“Go and beat yon boy, and let him learn to answer me better.”

‘Thereat they gat them staves, and made as though they would beat me; but I was ware of a pestle that stood under a wall, and seizing this, I drave them all of a heap till they ran, and John—he fled into a loft and shut the door. There I kept him till he promised by St. Richard to let us have all the land that my father had bequeathed to us; and anon I bade him come down, and went and kissed my brother, and then we were at one.

‘But all the while he was false, and was biding his time. For it so happed that a wrestling was cried thereabouts, and all the sturdy wights were to come and strive for the ram and the ring. I rode forth to see the wrestling, but as I lighted down of my steed and stood on the grass, I heard a franklin cry bitterly

* Angry.

for that the champion had slain two of his sons. Thereat I felt moved to revenge the poor franklin, and cried :

“ Good man, hold my horse, while my man draweth off my shoes, and do thou mind my clothes while I go wrestle with this champion.”

‘ Then barefoot and ungirt came I to the place where the champion sat, waiting to see if any should venture to contest further with him. It was well within the night, and the moon shone when we came together, yet many hundreds of folk sat to see what should hap.

‘ Well ! we cast many turns, but at the last I threw him on the left side and broke three of his ribs, and thereto his left arm, the which gave a great crack. “ Shall it be holden for a cast ? ” quoth I, and they all laughed, save only the champion, who cried somedeal ruefully, “ He is a lither master at this play than I ; sith I first wrestled I was never in my life handled so sore.” ’

At this the outlaws all laughed. They had heard this story full oft, and knew by heart every turn and point of it, but it always seemed fresh and new to these children of the forest, and they never tired of hearing how their leader played the man that day.

‘ So, my friends, I brought home the ram and the ring with a great rout of revellers ; but when my brother, who had looked that I should be slain outright, heard me coming, he sent to the porter and bad him spar and lock the gate.

“ Porter,” I cried, “ undo the gate ; for many

good men's sons stand thereat." But he swore by an horrible oath I should not come in.

' "Thou liest," I said; "so break I my chin!"* And at a word I ran full against the wicket, smote the panel with my foot, and brake away the pin. Open flew the door, away flew the porter; but in two strides I had overtaken him, and broken the bone in his neck; whom I then cast into the well hard by. Then did I open the great gates and let in the fair company, saying, "Ye be welcome, my masters; there be five tun of wine in my brother's cellar: so let us make merry."

' Seven days and seven nights we held high feast with much mirth and solace, but my brother lay the while in a little turret and durst not speak. On the eighth day my guests bade me good-day, and I was left alone with my brother and his servants. That false knight spake me fair, and promised to make me heir of his body by St. John.

' "Par ma foi!" said I; "is it even so?"

' "Yea, brother Leofric, but when thou didst throw my porter into the draw-well, I sware in my wrath to bind thee hand and foot. Let me bind thee now, that I be not forsworn."

' "Brother," said I, "thou shalt not be forsworn for the love of me."

' So they bound me fast, and tied me to a post in the hall; nor meat nor drink had I for two days and two nights. At last I said:

' "Adam Spencer, methinketh I fast too long. Now, I beseech thee, by the mochel love my father loved thee, loose me out of bond."

* Viz.: 'If I do not speak truth, may I break,' etc.

‘Adam—for he loved me from a boy—Adam, he sighed hard, sighed again, and anon looked at me with a nod. That night, when all were to bed, Adam took the keys and unlocked the fetters, then took he me into the spence* and gave me of meat and red wine, and thereto added a wise rede.†

“‘To-morrow,” he said, “is Sunday, and we shall have right good cheer with abbot and prior and other holy men—do as I thee bid.”

‘And he bade me, and even as he bade me so did I.

‘For on the morrow I stood by the post as though the fetters had been locked. And when all were served, I cried :

“‘How serve ye me? I stand here fasting. Lords, do, for Christ’s passion, help bring me out of this strait.”

‘But my brother told them I was mad, and they all cursed me. Then, when I saw that the wine was in, and the brain lay in their hoods, I looked on Adam, and he quickly brought two staves, one for me and one for himself, with the which we fell to and brake both arms and legs, setting my brother in the same fetters that had held me.

‘But some that had fled fetched the sheriff’s men, who came knocking at the gate with a strong party. Thus we deemed it best to flee by the postern gate into the woods. And now am I cried wolf’s head,‡ and who will shall kill me. My brother is sheriff, and hath the baillie,§ and to-morrow, Alured, he is to hold a court of the shire in the moot-hall.’

* Pantry.

† Advice.

‡ Outlaw.

§ Local government.

‘To-morrow, Leofric?’

‘Yea, by St. James of Galice! but I and my men shall be there.’

‘And so, by thy leave, shall I!’ cried Alured.

‘A good youth! I knew thy fiery mettle,’ replied Leofric, patting his younger brother’s broad shoulders.

‘But we must be wary,’ said Standish, now for the first time taking part in the talk; ‘we are the King’s good subjects, and must not countenance an attack on his sheriff.’

‘That is as thou listeth, fair sir,’ said the outlaw. ‘But for my part I have not found the King’s justice, even at Westminster, so even-handed and so proof against a bribe that I care much if I do his sheriff an ill turn.’

‘Alured, I hope thou wilt consider thy position,’ said Standish. ‘Thou wilt surely be marked. The Archbishop, and even the King, shall get to hear of it, and where then will be thy chance of honour?’

‘My place is beside my brother,’ said Alured doggedly.

The outlaws began to murmur at Standish, and he was forced to hold his peace; but he hoped that the morning would bring with it saner counsels. So he wrapped himself in his cloak and fell asleep. It was daylight when, starting up from the couch of bracken, John Standish found that the outlaws had gone, taking with them Alured and all the horses except one.

So, not without some misgiving, he set off with his attendants through the forest, making for

Epping. He feared much whither Alured's impulsive rashness should lead him, and, in fearing for Alured, he could not help pitying Carlotta.

'He is fool enough to go in his squire's habit, with the Lambeth cognizance blazoned on his breast; and if any misdeed be attempted, he shall be known of all—poor boy!—and may lose an ear, or be cut out from his master's mainpast.'*

* 'The protection and guarantee of a great lord.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE autumn of 1380 was beginning to blow loose leaves about the water-side, and the Strand all along the Thames was strewn with yellow crumpled waifs from the great gardens of the Savoy Palace and the inns of the nobles that were built on the north shore.

Master Chaucer, with his hood closely drawn by reason of the great west wind, was pacing along the Strand, humming as he went a glad refrain ; for all moods of nature were welcome to Geoffrey Chaucer, and, though he was merry in lady's bower, yet his heart leapt out to all the miracles of beauty in field or forest, garden or shining river, and made him sing as blithe a song as the bird that knows no care at sundown.

When he reached the palace called the Wardrobe, where the King's mother usually 'kept' when she was not at Eltham, he sought admittance, and was presently ushered into the bower of Princess Joan. The Fair Maid of Kent, as folk still called her, though years were dimming her beauty and care had begun to draw harsh lines about her brow, was engaged in reading aloud to her ladies when Chaucer entered. The poet had caught the last words—she

had been reading the Gospel in English from Wyclif's Bible—and he said, with a low bow and a smile :

‘ May your sweet grace never stand in need of sanctuary !’

‘ Ah ! Master Chaucer, so thou dost know we were reading on the English Bible. ’Twas a foolish Act to pass, was it not ?’

‘ What was that, madame ?’ said lady Sibyl de Feschamp.

‘ Why, Parliament hath enacted that any who shall read the Holy Scripture in the English tongue shall forfeit the right of sanctuary.’

‘ Sonties, madame ! art not afraid to run such a danger ?’

‘ Foolish child ! what likelihood is there that we should ever stand in such peril ? Besides, the Word of God seemeth to come home and roost in the heart more tenderly when it cometh in homely English guise.’

‘ I have learned from your grace to value the English tongue. If in my poor singing I go down to later ages as a maker worth remembering, it will be, in part, because I have learned here to eschew French and Latin, and to trust my thoughts to homely English.’

‘ And my teacher, Master Chaucer, is the much-abused Father Wyclif.’

‘ Well, madame, there are times for all writers. For instance, if I want a moral discourse, I run to my friend Gower ; if I tire of the proud insolence of the nobles, I read Master Langland’s “ Vision of Piers Plowman ;” and if I tire of fulsome flattery,

I hie me to my house over Aldgate and have a rare chat with my wife.'

The whimsical puckering of a rueful face made all the ladies laugh; it pleased them to think that when Madame Chaucer had been over-shrewish in temper, the poet should come to them for solace.

'I think,' said Lady Mary de Molyneux, 'that some of thy female characters have been written from nature, have they not? Here is the lady Sibyl vows thou hast limned* her in the "Court of Love," when thou singest:

"In bounty, favour, port and seemliness,
Pleasant of figure, mirrour of delight,
Gracious to see and root of gentleness,
With angel visage, lusty red and white."

'Oh, Mary, have done!' cried Sibyl, blushing from brow to bosom, and biting her lip in vexation. 'I never said not† such thing.'

Chaucer gazed admiringly upon the fair girl, and took note of the blush that poured from cheek to brow and tinted ear and shoulder with sunset crimson, nor did he speak till the rare colours faded away.

'Sure, modesty is full seemly! as Terence saith, "Erubuit! salva res est." But, to tell sooth, I have ever mixed my colours and blended my models, taking here a tint and there a feature. I have drawn on your gracious mistress for a portrait of a certain princess I am composing; and in my "Court of Love" I had in my eye, of course, the ladies of this charming court, but also a young maid who

* Drawn.

† The double negative gave emphasis.

liveth in the City—a tall, dark-haired girl of uncommon loveliness :

“ Her nose directed straight, and even as line,
With form and shape thereto convenient . . .
Her mouth is short, and shut in little space,
Flaming somedeal, not over-red, I mean,
With pregnant lips, and thick to kiss, percase ;
(For lippès thin, not fat, but ever lean,
They serve of nought—they be not worth a bean.) ”

‘ Benedicite ! we must see this maiden,’ said the Princess.

‘ I would bring her hither some day, madame, if in good sooth thou wouldst have speech with her.’

‘ What is her name ?’ asked Sibyl carelessly.

‘ One Carlotta, daughter of the poet they call Long Will.’

‘ What ! is that William Langland ? I love to read his satires,’ replied the Princess. ‘ He deals his blows so fairly all round : from the Church with her “glutton masses”—eating and drinking in honour of the blessed Virgin forsooth, and in church too !—to the misproud barons and the churl that loiters by the ale-stake.’

‘ Yea, madame ; had the poet more art to manage his words, he might prove immortal. But I may bring hither his daughter ?’

The Princess warmly assented, and Chaucer thenceforth sought an opportunity to entice Carlotta to the Wardrobe.

Thus a few days afterwards Dan Chaucer might have been seen wending his way slowly through the City towards Cornhill. Though dressed in a sober,

dark robe, as a clerk, he attracted more attention than he knew; for the round, elvish face, the forked, yellow beard, and harnessed knife that hung from his neck were all familiar to the London folk; and as the poet smiled to himself while bright fancies shot across his sunny mind, first one and then another turned on heel to gaze upon the poet and friend of John of Gaunt. For he was too busy just now with his own brain-picturings to take note of the dandy in jagged cloak and cracowes, tied from toe to knee with silver chains; of the merchant, splendid in his robe of red, lined with blue, and wearing a Flanders beaver on his head; nor did he note the monks and friars, the apprentices and wimpled matrons that he met. On reaching Langland's house he found the lower room, which served as kitchen and parlour in one, occupied by two gray friars and little Willie.

The boy rose to bid Master Chaucer welcome. The friars kept their seats, and looked a little disconcerted.

'Why, Willie! where are thy mother and sister?'

'Sister is out with father; but mother is dusting in the solar.'

'I will take this settle by the fire. Pray, what may you be talking about? for I seem to have broken in upon your converse.'

One of the friars coughed, and put fingers before his mouth; but the boy, whose cheek was fever-hot, burst into tears.

'The child is sick—call his mother,' said the other friar.

'I am not ill. Oh! sir—Master Chaucer—save me from these Franciscan brothers! save me, or I must go!'

'His mind wanders. Pay no heed to him.'

But Chaucer drew the boy to him and kissed his forehead, whispering gentle, soothing words into his ear. And, little by little, the poor child told him, with a sob here and there, that the friars had been trying to make him leave Lambeth and go into their friary.

'Are ye not ashamed, frères, to so work upon a sick child's fears?'

'Not if it be good for his soul's health. If he be to die young he cannot have a better chance of going to heaven than by dying in a friar's gown. Thou must know that, Dan Chaucer.'

Chaucer's eyes twinkled merrily.

'Better for ye if ye cleave to the great spiritual task your convent sets before you: distributing pins and gossip to all the housewives about. Leave this boy, who hath powerful friends, or ye will rue the day.'

Dame Langland, hearing raised voices, came down the ladder.

'Master Chaucer, as I live! Give you greeting, fair sir.'

'Good-day to thee, dame! 'Tis time thou wert come; for thy holy guests here have well-nigh stolen thy son from thee.'

'And were it so bad a change, Master Chaucer? They say his grace of Lambeth gets everywhere evil words and threats.'



CHAUCER SPOILS THE FRIARS' SPORT.

‘That is why I would cling to him,’ said Willie—
‘my dear master! who hath been so kind to me. I
may never quit his service.’

‘Hear the boy!’ said his mother—‘a true chip of
the old block. That over-subtle sense of honour
ever stood in the way of my goodman’s promotion.
Lord love ye! they are so simple, father and son, I
verily believe that when the last trump shall sound
they will both stand aside and let all the rout get to
heaven before them.’

‘The good dame thinks going to heaven shall be
regulated like the pressing into Bartholomew fair,
where the lustiest win the front seats,’ said Chaucer
with a low laugh.

‘We have brought you a new recipe, honest dame,
for blancmanger,’ said one of the friars, rummaging
in his wallet.

‘Ah! that is good of thee, i’ faith. Master Chaucer
may like to write it down for his good housewife.
Pray read it up.’

The friar held the sheepskin to the light, and
read with some unction :

“New way to make blanc-manger.—Take a capon
and cut the brawn out of him while alive; parboil
the brawn till the flesh come from the bone, and
then dry him as dry as thou canst in a fair cloth.
Take a pair of cards, and card him as small as
possible; then take a pottle of milk, and a pottle of
cream, and half a pound of rye-flower, and your
carved brawn of the capon, put all into a pan and
stir all together: then set it upon the fire, and when
it beginneth to boil, put thereto half a pound of honey

or beaten sugar, and a saucer full of rose-water, and so let it boil till it be very thick ; then put it into a charger till it be cold. When cold, serve it up.”

‘Ah!’ said Chaucer, ‘how wroth Master Wyclif would be if he knew ye had got so fair a recipe!’

‘Marry! ’tis he falls foul on our order, saying, “The friars feign them subtle in physic to get into rich men’s houses.”’

Yea,’ brake in the other, ‘and he says we become kitchen-clerks to lords.’

‘Ah! he is envious. Now I’ll warrant ye have tested this same recipe.’

‘Once or twice, Dan Chaucer ; but, for me, I am a man of little sustenance. My spirit hath his fostering on the Bible.’

Chaucer’s eyes glanced merrily from the fat brother into the red fire, but he said nothing ; only there he sat, dumb as a mouse, while the friars lisped and told love-stories and spread their wares before Dame Langland.

Very merry gentlemen were these friars, and knew how to season their talk with good stories, dropping here and there a text to let you know that their real business in calling was to sow the good seed. But if St. Francis, or his first minorites, could have seen the warm socks and cloth boots, the semi-cope of double worsted and the scrip stuffed full of tempting wares, he would have hardly recognised a poor Franciscan.

As they chatted on, and the dame stopped once and again in the peeling of her apples to press her hand to her side for aching laughter, and Willie had

forgot his troubles in the sparkling jest, and Dan Chaucer's round face was dimpled with genial smiles, the latch was lifted and Carlotta appeared, carrying under her arm a roll of parchment.

Her large dark eyes seemed to look coldly on the friars, but Chaucer kissed her hand and made room for her by himself.

'Master Chaucer,' she said, 'I would have thee to know that my father much mislikes the visit of these good friars Cordeliers, who are fain to carry off Willie for the sake of his sweet voice.'

'And his soul's salvation, my daughter,' said both the friars.

'I shall note it, sweet damoiselle. If they give further trouble, apply to me, and I will set great men at work.'

'While his grace of Canterbury is away at Northampton, my brother is to bide here. Father on no account would have him quit Lambeth.'

'Humph! the rats are leaving the rotten garret already,' said the fat friar. 'Two of his squires have deserted him, they say.'

'Squires!' exclaimed Carlotta, surprised out of her maidenly reserve.

'Yea, daughter—two that we have seen haunting round here.'

Chaucer looked up into the handsome face.

'Now, will she—can she blush, as that court beauty blushed the other day?' he said to himself.

But Carlotta's face grew marble pale after a faint first tinge of pink, and she calmly asked on what authority they made their statement.

‘We dined at the Archbishop’s board yesterday, and heard them talk of it. It was in everybody’s mouth. The two squires had deserted.’

‘I do not believe it.’

The deep contralto voice, softly modulated but full of firm conviction, again awoke Chaucer from his day-dreams. He started up, and said :

‘Neither do I. Let us go to Princess Joanna and ask her about it.’

‘What mean’st, Dan Chaucer?’ said the dame.

‘Wilt go, Carlotta? I was asked days ago to bring thee—for thy dear father’s sake.’

Carlotta hesitated.

‘If for my father’s sake, then must I . . .’

‘St. Peter! art thou mad, fond wench? Wouldst go to court like a raker* of Chepe? Do on thy flowered kirtle and horned head-dress.’

‘Give me leave, dame,’ said Chaucer; ‘her old weeds† shall suit her best.’

Thus Carlotta went to the Wardrobe by the river to see the King’s mother, thinking little of her coarse robe, but much of the news she had heard.

* Vagrant hawker of wares.

† Clothes.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ladies of the court were clustered about the tapestry curtain which was drawn between the ante-room, in which they were, and the presence-chamber, where Carlotta and Chaucer were talking with the Princess.

‘How beautiful thy rival is, Sibyl!’ said one, as she peeped through the curtains and turned to banter her pretty companion.

‘She kneels before her grace and looks up for all the world like a saint!’

‘She is anything but that,’ muttered Sibyl spitefully.

‘She made both the squires in love with her, did she not?’

‘She tried her best.’

‘Did she buy a love-potion?’

A suppressed titter from the bevy of girls warned Sibyl that her own attempt in that direction was not yet forgotten.

‘Does the Princess know how high she aspires in her ambition, Sibyl?’

‘Oh yes! Be sure I told her grace what the minx was intriguing about.’

‘But our lady is actually kissing her, girls!’

The hussy! to bewitch our good Princess with her demon eyes!

‘Shalt thou have speech with her, Sibyl?’

‘Yea, marry! When she comes forth, do ye retire behind the arras;* then if I do not make her wince I am no true Norman.’

When Carlotta’s interview was over, Chaucer led the girl down the room towards the tapestry. Here the lady Sibyl was in waiting.

‘May I beg permission to have a few words with this young maiden, Dan Chaucer? Lady Mary will pour thee a glass of Rhenish yonder.’

Chaucer bowed and retired to a further corner of the anteroom. Carlotta stood facing Sibyl, neither curtsying nor seeming fluttered at being made so much of by a court beauty.

‘Ah! may I ask if the Princess hath imparted the news concerning two young squires that we both, in different ways, are interested in?’

‘I have heard from her highness that two of my brother’s friends . . .’

‘Oh yes; thy brother’s friends. I had forgotten how it stood.’ Sibyl was forced to make this apology, because the dignity of Carlotta’s rebuke made a sudden coward of her.

‘It seems that the young King hath demanded the services of Master John Standish; whereas I had been told that he had deserted,’ said Carlotta.

‘It was false. Standish is a young man of honour, who would never desert his lord. I rejoiced to hear of his promotion. But the other?’

* Tapestry.

‘He, it is reported—so saith her grace—that outlaws carried him off into the forest, to hold for ransom, perchance.’

‘That is the story which hath been told her grace ; for we would not affright her with bad news. But, young woman, it is right thou shouldst know, as being the daughter of a man who hath helped no little to stir up the commons to disaffection, that Alured of Dene went willingly with the outlaws—he was not taken to hold for ransom !’

‘How dost thou know that, lady ?’ said Carlotta with a gasp.

‘Because I have his warrant for it under his own hand and seal.’

‘He hath written to thee ?’

‘Yea ; is that so unseemly a thing to do for a clerkly squire ? Thou art aware, I presume, that the young man used to vex me with his wooing, and that I repulsed him several times as harshly as I dare.’

‘In sooth, lady, I had thought the boot was on the other leg.’

An unmistakable titter from behind the arras made Sibyl colour with vexation. She resolved to give Carlotta no quarter now.

‘Thou think’st perhaps that I harbour jealous feelings for that the fond youth would toy with such as thou ?’

Carlotta blushed with shame ; her eyes kindled as she fixed them on Sibyl.

‘It is not so,’ Sibyl went on. ‘It might have been had this youth been other than he is ; but from the moment I saw his loyalty to the King had been

tampered with by intercourse with thy father's friends, I abhorred him.'

'Thou hast news that I have not received, lady Sibyl; I may not contradict thee in the dark. But if a girl of my standing had stood up and said such things of my father and my father's friends, I should have . . .'

'Should have done or said what?'

'I should have thought her a malicious talebearer, and have eschewed her further acquaintance.'

'I envy thee that high, tragic air, and those deep, majestic tones; but, excuse me, it would better befit a miracle play than a boudoir.'

'Hast thou aught further to say? for my time is valuable.'

'I will pay thee for it, girl, at market price. Yes, I have more to tell thee. I am going to return good for evil. See this letter! No! I cannot let thee read it; but thou seest it is his seal? Well! he dares to write to me, saying that he has by force recovered the land bequeathed to him by his father. He hints that great changes may soon occur which shall make him a great lord, and all this he lays at my feet if I will wed him.'

Sibyl paused to watch the effect of her words; but Carlotta stood like a statue, and her glowing black eyes seemed to fascinate Sibyl.

'I am ready to answer him,' Sibyl went on, averting her eyes, 'if I have thy permission, that I cannot wed a traitor, but am ready to forward any scheme he may suggest for conveying thee to his new home.'

'Me!'

The indignant tone rang through the chamber, and made Chaucer start up and come forward.

‘What is the coil, my sweet child?’

‘Take me from this den of lies, Master Chaucer; I cannot breathe in it. Ah! I have been insulted by this—this lady.’

‘I crave her pardon, Master Chaucer,’ whispered Sibyl, with a very white face; ‘I did not mean any insult.’

‘Carlotta, come thy ways, child; thou art not skilled in courtly phrases.’

At the door Carlotta turned and said:

‘Farewell! If it should hap that some day the grand lady should need the help of a daughter of the people . . .’

But she put her hand on her heart and fell back into Chaucer’s arms, who hurried her down the stairs.

Three or four of Sibyl’s friends rushed forth, crying:

‘Show us the letter! we never saw it.’

‘Fools!’ cried Sibyl, ‘it is an old letter I showed her. My own ready wit made up that story, just to vex and pinch her.’

‘Ah! it was like Sibyl,’ said Mary de Molyneux; ‘she is always cruel to those whose resentment she does not fear.’

‘But it was a good jest, was it not? Just think, my dear friends, what are we coming to, if a wench of the people is to come between us and our chevaliers! It is insufferable!’

‘Yes,’ they all exclaimed in chorus; ‘she certainly did merit a putting down.’ But the better ones felt

uneasy, and said softly one to another, 'She need not have told the girl a lie.'

Carlotta said little to Chaucer as they walked home; but when she was alone with her father that evening she looked up from her manuscript and said:

'Father, do the commons show any new disaffection?'

'Nothing strange. The movement of discontent seems to grow and gather strength. When three or four are talking in the street, two shall be Lollards or else followers of John Ball.'

'But there hath been no overt act that thou wottest of?'

'None of any moment, dear child.'

Langland looked up from his copying-desk for a moment and reflected. There was something in the tone of Carlotta's voice that seemed unusual. He wondered if she had heard aught of some news concerning Alured of Dene, which he had gathered not long ago.

After some minutes Carlotta again put down her pencil and said:

'Father, if this coil between lord and peasant should grow to a civil war, should we—shouldst thou—dost not think the insolence of the nobles well merits a chastisement?'

'Come hither, Calote, and kneel by me, as thou didst when thou wert but a wee thing. Poor minion! hath the insolence of lord or lady turned thy loyalty to revolt? What! tears? Come, my sweet child, make me thy confessor; who hath done thee wrong?'

Then she told him in general terms how rudely the lady Sibyl had dealt with her, but kept back the insulting suggestion that she should take up the squire whom Sibyl no longer cared for as an admirer.

‘Now, mark me, child, we may not be too careful how we believe all stories that run through the town. At Lambeth I heard a different account, and he who spake with me had it from a letter of Standish. Standish, it seems, has been added to the young King’s body-guard, as a squire of honour; now, as he and his friend were riding from Cambridge, they met some outlaws led by a brother of Alured of Dene. That headstrong youth was persuaded too easily to engage in an attempt against his eldest brother’s authority—purely on private grounds, and not at all as a rebel against law and the throne.’

‘Alas! Why did not honest John Standish check his rashness?’

‘Had he done so it would have saved bloodshed.’

Carlotta pressed nearer to her father and shuddered.

‘Sir John Dene was holding a court, when suddenly a horn blew without, and these outlaws rushed in. Leofric of Dene claimed justice, and was telling how his father had bequeathed his land in three equal portions, when Sir John gave him the lie, and ordered his men to close the doors and arrest the rioters.’

‘And is Alured in prison—hurt, perhaps?’

‘No; not he. The outlaws sped a flight of arrows. Sir John was struck in the throat, and presently bled to death; then all the villeins and churls acclaimed the new lords with wild clamours of joy.’

‘But shall it not go hard with the brothers for killing the King’s sheriff?’

‘Let us hope for the best, Calote. It seems they were fighting for their rights. Sir John was a wicked knight. Standish will make all plain to the Archbishop and the King. This is not a time when we can afford to cut off gallant young vavasours, just when the country is honeycombed with secret societies and rank with rebels.’

Langland, who loved the old alliteration, rang out the last words so vehemently, that the dame, who had gone to bed an hour ago, cried out from below stairs :

‘Saints have mercy ! get thee to thy bower, wench, and send thy father down to bed.’

So Carlotta crept to her little bower—not much more than a large cupboard in the wall—and thought sadly on all she had heard that day. Alured was not dead, nor hurt ; but had he written to offer his false love to the lady Sibyl ? She was a fool to have set her love on one so far above her. She would crush down this love-longing for a worthless, heartless noble. Henceforth she would devote her life to her father and mother ; where her duty lay, there should her heart be also. But just when she had made this firm resolve, some weak pity for herself brake out in her heart, and the tears flowed and great sobs shook her in her bed ; and good Dame Langland, who could not sleep for thinking on her new blancmanger, nudged Long Will and said :

‘Get up, Will, and go bid Carlotta stint of her weeping. One would think she was a chit yet under the yard.’*

* Rod.

So Langland got him out of bed and went softly up the ladder into the solar, where all was dark. There he knelt awhile before the crucifix, which he knew was hanging on the wall opposite the window—knelt and prayed that God would temper the wind to his poor lamb; and when he heard the heavy sobs die down, he rose from his knees and sang, ever so softly, some of the chaunts that Carlotta loved best—sang them to the Latin versicles which she and he had so often practised together in a happier time.

But she, as she lay in her narrow bed, absorbed in her own grief, heard the thrilling tones as though they had come from afar—from some star-world in the great abyss of God's creation, and she half rose, leaning on one elbow, listening with parted lips as one spellbound. But when a deeper note told her that it was no heavenly music, but her dear father trying to sing her to sleep, the glad tears flowed afresh, and after a little while she softly called :

‘ Father ! father ! ’

And he went to her bedside and kissed her, saying :

‘ May the grace of God be with thee, darling, and keep thee in all thy ways ! ’

‘ I thank thee, dearest father. Now leave me ; I will try and be good and not weep any more. Hush ! don't tell my mother ; she would not understand. God be with thee, kind father ! ’

So strangely had communion of work and interest made the daughter cling to her father, rather than to her mother, in this crisis of her maidenhood.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE winter of 1380 passed drearily enough. Those who had glass windows—a rare luxury—could see in the daytime, but those who were obliged to keep the shutters up in order to keep out the frost and snow led a tedious life indoors. For torches smoked and were expensive, and how could you light your house with oil-lamps? If you were a great lord or a city merchant, you might afford it. Common people must sit by the fire in the ingle, sing songs and tell stories to keep out the doleful dumps, and thank God when the spring sunshine came peeping in across the silver Thames.

No wonder Will Langland haunted the tavern in Cornhill when his dame was more sharp than usual; but he would shake his dark head reprovingly when he found the talk growing disloyal.

One afternoon, as he sat with others crushing a cup of canary, one came in breathless, saying:

‘John Ball hath been sent to gaol again by Archbishop Simon of Sudbury!’

Groans and muttered curses went round, and Langland was appealed to, as it was known his son was a page at Lambeth.

‘Yes, masters, I am afraid it is true. Master Ball

was too free with his tongue, calling for equality—an absurd idea.’

Suddenly some craftsman started up and shouted:

“When Adam delved and Evè span,
Who was then the gentleman?”

The rest took it up, and chaunted the lines over and over again.

‘Why, Long Will,’ said one, ‘it was thy poem which first set us a-thinking how we should right ourselves:

“His wife walked beside him, with a long ox-goad,
In a clouted* coat cut short to the knee;
Her bare feet on the bleak ice bled as she went.”

And wilt thou desert our cause now we are near winning?’

‘Ah! my heart is with you, boys, when ye sue for your rights, but not when ye listen to mad counsels, pass secret signs in the road, drill o’ nights, choose leaders of revolt, and collect arms of war.’

Then another, crying, ‘Long Will hath the tunsure!’ sang out lustily:

“For clerks—they say we shall be fain
For livelihood to sweat and swink,
And they right nought us give again,
Neither to eat nor yet to drink.
They make us thralls e’en at their lust,
And say we may not else be saved;
They have the corn and we the dust,
Who speaks them ill—they say he raved.”

Langland stood up by the fire, lifting his long form above the angry faces, and said in his sad, quiet tone:

* Patched.

‘Good friends, ye know how I suffer with my poor brethren. But this I say—when you accuse the Church of making thralls, you run counter to your own experience.’

‘Yea! yea!’ shouted a score of voices.

‘But who passed the poll-tax?’ roared another.

‘Three groats for every male and female over fifteen years old,’ cried a third.

‘Accuse not Simon of Sudbury, my masters. The money was wanted to pay for the losses by sea and land—one fleet beaten by the Spaniards, a second sunk in a storm, a campaign foully ended in the heart of France. The money must be got somewhere.’

‘It shall never be wrung out of the needy!’

‘I wist not why ye make moan now. Ye are better off than your fathers were. The Black Death, they say, hath brought down the population from four to two millions, and so doubled the wages.’

A howl of indignation against the Statute of Labourers, which had tried to keep wages down by law to the old rate, interrupted Langland.

‘Then prices have been raised. Ye are better fed, better clothed, better paid than your fathers were. Divers of ye have got your freedom.’

‘Yea,’ brake in a franklin of Hertfordshire; ‘but the lawyers who mind the affairs of the manor are everywhere cancelling, on grounds of informality, manumissions and exemptions which have long passed without question.’

‘Shame!’

To this Langland assented, saying:

‘If such evil things are doing, Lord help the right!’

Then a tiler got up and read aloud, amid fierce approval :

‘ Jack Carter prays you all that ye make a good end of that ye have begun, and do well and aye better and better ; for at the even men heareth the day.’

The allusion to one of Langland’s own lines made every man in the tavern rise to his feet and cry :

‘ God save Long Will !’

But the poet plunged his shaggy black head between his knees, and when the shouts died away they could hear the big man sobbing like a child, and ‘ God pardon me ! God pardon me !’ burst from his lips at intervals.

The strangeness of this emotion held all the company spellbound in a great silence for the space of a full half-minute ; then the franklin rose up and patted the poet on the back, saying :

‘ Pluck up heart, man alive ; thou art the noblest preacher in all this realm, and, when all is done, shalt be Archbishop of Canterbury.’

‘ Ah ! my lads, when I see you madly bent on a course which can only lead to destruction . . .’

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‘ Long Will is an honest man, but he talks like a clerk. Now, I have been to the wars on the Continent, and I have seen how the yeoman’s arrow is more than a match for the knight’s spear. Think of the Jacquerie, when the French peasants made their masters fly before them. Think of the fullers and webbers of Ghent and Bruges, how they have put down their feudal lords. Pah ! the

brutal Earl of Flanders had no chance against the brave burghers, headed by such men as Van Artavelde and John Lyon. Stand together, boys, and the victory is ours.'

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Take enough and cry Ho!
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Such were the rehearsals that were being played in every tavern and alehouse in England through all that bleak winter of 1380-81. The people were maddened by a sense of wrong coming after a sense of relief—maddened by suffering caused by arbitrary legislation; and having tasted the cup of freedom and contentment, and being inspired anew by the teaching of an open Bible, they resolved to attempt what they heard their fellow-craftsmen across the narrow sea were successfully doing, and win by force their freedom from villeinage, the reduction of rent of land, and full liberty to buy and sell in open fair or market.

Meanwhile at Windsor and Shene, at Eltham and the Tower, King Richard and his courtiers were enjoying themselves right merrily. What did they care if the shoeless ribalds were freezing on the road? So long as the pine-log sang bravely on the dogs, and the blue smoke rose pleasantly into the louvre,*

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'It was done after consideration of Parliament, sire; it was thought that a graduated tax would not fall so heavily on the poor. In the country every male and female of fifteen years shall pay three groats;* but in cities and towns the sum needed is to be divided among the inhabitants according to their abilities, or in such a way that none shall pay less than a groat, or more than sixty groats for himself and his wife. The clergy, sire, have not spared themselves, as thou knowest: each monk, or friar, or nun pays half a mark,† each secular priest pays as much.'

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How often he promised this, and how often he was too weak to keep his word, none can say. But at least when he made the promise he was in earnest, for he loved his mother dearly.

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The girls clustered about him at first and made him feel very awkward, but she contrived to lead him to an angle in the wall and have a few words with him in private.

She upbraided him for losing the King’s favour, saying :

‘ The Princess Joan commended thee to her royal son, and she is sore offended that thou dost not

please him better; and, to tell sooth, there is someone else who feels hurt at thy being left in the cold.'

Sibyl's eyes told poor Standish plainly enough who this someone was.

'Lady Sibyl, what can I do? The King wanted me to gamble! I have promised my father never to do so, and I will not!'

'But, my dear friend, if the King asks it of thee?'

'Then must the King bear my blunt "I will not." He took it in ill part, too, when I advised him to heed wiser heads than—those yonder.'

'Sonties! if a poor squire is to advise his King, what shall become of the court! Thou art too frank, too truth-loving, John Standish: fortunes are never made by such unbending wills.'

'I reckon less of fortune than of duty, lady.'

'But thou wouldst win the lady of thy choice, I wis?'

Standish looked into the bright, sunny face, and felt bewildered. How hard was it now to cling to the rough path of conscience and right. At last he made a desperate effort to disentangle himself:

'Methinks my friend, Alured of Dene, would make a better courtier than I; thou hast, I trow, a kindness for him. I am—I am . . .'

'Thou art a brave and loyal soldier, albeit far too modest and lacking in confidence; and he of Dene is a false rebel, albeit of gracious mien.'

'What! dost thou know of his doings, Sibyl?'

Her enthusiastic praise of him had rung so true in its warmth, that the squire had been quite thawed again, and he gently murmured her name.

‘I have heard of his doings against the King’s peace; and only the other day news came that he had joined the folk of Fobbing in Essex, who had refused to pay the tax. They forced Sir Robert Belknappe, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, to flee away, and they chopped off the heads of the jurors and clerks of the commission.’

‘And did Alured aid and abet in this disorder?’

‘Yea, verily. The poor fool hath been guiled by promises. But of thee, Master Standish, we hope better things. Let us hear that thou hast learned more courtesy, and we shall all be right glad.’

Standish was left in a whirl of conflicting thoughts. Once or twice he could not help asking himself if the lady Sibyl’s advice was what his good father would approve; and what made him somewhat misdoubt her was the thought that she encouraged him only because of his possibilities of rising in the world. ‘Let me be down, and will she stoop to pick me up?’ He shook his head sadly when he thought on such matters; but the image of the lady Sibyl, golden-haired, radiant, beautiful in purple samite and white fur, still dazzled his eyes and fluttered his heart.

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please him better ; and, to tell sooth, there is someone else who feels hurt at thy being left in the cold.'

Sibyl's eyes told poor Standish plainly enough who this someone was.

'Lady Sibyl, what can I do? The King wanted me to gamble! I have promised my father never to do so, and I will not!'

'But, my dear friend, if the King asks it of thee?'

'Then must the King bear my blunt "I will not."' He took it in ill part, too, when I advised him to heed wiser heads than—those yonder.'

'Sonties! if a poor squire is to advise his King, what shall become of the court! Thou art too frank, too truth-loving, John Standish: fortunes are never made by such unbending wills.'

'I reckon less of fortune than of duty, lady.'

'But thou wouldst win the lady of thy choice, I wis?'

Standish looked into the bright, sunny face, and felt bewildered. How hard was it now to cling to the rough path of conscience and right. At last he made a desperate effort to disentangle himself:

'Methinks my friend, Alured of Dene, would make a better courtier than I; thou hast, I trow, a kindness for him. I am—I am . . .'

'Thou art a brave and loyal soldier, albeit far too modest and lacking in confidence; and he of Dene is a false rebel, albeit of gracious mien.'

'What! dost thou know of his doings, Sibyl?'

Her enthusiastic praise of him had rung so true in its warmth, that the squire had been quite thawed again, and he gently murmured her name.

‘I have heard of his doings against the King’s peace; and only the other day news came that he had joined the folk of Fobbing in Essex, who had refused to pay the tax. They forced Sir Robert Belknappe, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, to flee away, and they chopped off the heads of the jurors and clerks of the commission.’

‘And did Alured aid and abet in this disorder?’

‘Yea, verily. The poor fool hath been guiled by promises. But of thee, Master Standish, we hope better things. Let us hear that thou hast learned more courtesy, and we shall all be right glad.’

Standish was left in a whirl of conflicting thoughts. Once or twice he could not help asking himself if the lady Sibyl’s advice was what his good father would approve; and what made him somewhat misdoubt her was the thought that she encouraged him only because of his possibilities of rising in the world. ‘Let me be down, and will she stoop to pick me up?’ He shook his head sadly when he thought on such matters; but the image of the lady Sibyl, golden-haired, radiant, beautiful in purple samite and white fur, still dazzled his eyes and fluttered his heart.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT last the fell wintry months had gone by, and the June sun had set the birds a-singing—for they never rebel, but are ever thankful. But the hearts of the people were no softer towards those whom they thought their persecutors; and first amongst these was Simon of Sudbury.

Poor Archbishop! how he would pace up and down the little terrace at Lambeth, whence he could see the silver Thames and the Parliament House and the great Abbey, with its refectory and stately church. Sometimes, too—for sounds come so clearly over the water—he caught words of threat and mischief from occupant of skiff and wherry, and he saw fists shaken at his fortress-palace, and heard his own name grievously cursed.

Then would he sigh and bemoan his fate, pleading softly to himself, 'Lord, have I not done my best for King and realm? Have I enriched myself at the expense of the poor? Have I neglected the sigh of the debtor and the sorrowful? Lord, thou knowest!'

And anon he would go into his scriptorium, or study, and try to drown remorse in deep draughts of learning, but would start up in the middle of his reading, and cry, 'Heu! culpa mea! ego peccator!'

(Alas! mine is the fault! I am the sinner!) 'The priest hath neglected his sheep to become the statesman. "They that take the sword shall perish by the sword." Ha! what if that mad poet's vision should turn out a true foresight! It was in this room he saw it! God avert the omen! Yet the people heap all their wrongs on me—on me, who would willingly die for them.'

After one such fit of depression—it was on a balmy June evening—the Archbishop repaired to an upper chamber, where his little page Willie lay grievously sick of an intermittent fever.

By the bedside Carlotta sat, preparing some wool for the spinning-wheel.

'He sleeps? Hush! do not rise, my daughter. I will sit by the window here. How still and peaceful all seemeth! Nature's Sabbath! Would that the repose of the world external might typify a like change in the hearts of our disaffected people!'

'Are things no quieter outside, dear my lord?'

'We have not heard of any overt acts of violence; indeed, a strange calm pervades the land. They say I am a frightened old clerk, but somehow I seem to fancy that Revolt is only holding her breath to listen to her own heart-beats; she is waiting to spring! I cannot get the young King to take it seriously. No steps are taken to call together any defence. I am laughed at for a dotard!'

How strange did this poor maiden think it that the powerful Chancellor of England should run on thus before her. But she looked timidly into his face, and saw that it was ashen gray: so old he looked, and worn, and crestfallen!

‘Father, thou art ill! Let me get thee a cordial!’
Carlotta had knelt beside him and kissed his hand.

The Archbishop looked down and smiled tenderly upon her; then he lifted his hand and blessed her.

Scarce was the episcopal blessing pronounced, when Willie started up, round-eyed, in his truckle-bed and screamed:

‘Take care! take care! He is coming! John Standish is coming!’

‘Alas! he grows light-headed,’ said Carlotta.

The Archbishop, whose nerves were unstrung—or was it some subtle thought-wave that had power on his brain?—looked forth of the window.

‘See, daughter!’ he whispered; ‘is not yon barge a royal galley that sweepeth hitherward in such hot haste?’

‘The banner that trails at the stern bears the royal symbol—a white hart, chained; and the rowers wear red and white, the royal livery.’

‘I thought so. By the way they splash the water up, they must be more than common hurried.’

Carlotta had been shading her eyes with her hand. Suddenly she cried:

‘Oh, my father, it is as the sick boy prophesied! There sits in the stern none other than thy late squire, John Standish!’

‘Run down, my daughter, and meet this messenger. I will tarry by the bedside of the child.’

Carlotta hastened down the stone staircase. The Archbishop knelt by Willie’s bed and prayed.

The boy opened his eyes, looking for his sister, but seeing only a gray head buried in the bedclothes, he cried:

‘ Sister! sister!’

The Archbishop lifted his face, still kneeling by the bed, and said :

‘ Thy dear Carlotta hath gone downstairs, Willie Fear not.’

‘ Oh, bid her come up again ! I am all alone.’

‘ Nay, dear boy ; I am with thee.’

‘ Art thou alive, then ?’

‘ Yea, in sooth. The fever mars thy thinking. It is I, thy dear father in God, who am here praying for thee.’

‘ Will it be very hard dying, think’st thou, dear my lord ?’

‘ Our heavenly Father shall temper the pain. Dost feel weak ?’

‘ I had a full strange dream last night. I dreamed that thou and I went to heaven on one day. Thou wert holding my hand so kindly.’

‘ Dear child ! do thou pray for me, and I will pray for thee.’

‘ I have prayed. And the Lord said unto me, “ My servant Simon shall go by another and a harder way ; yet shall he bide for thee by the great golden gates that lead . . . alas ! I am so weary—so weary !’

The poor child sank back in a faint. The mighty Chancellor dashed a tear from his eye. The fevered utterances of his page had made his heart swell with love to God. The hardness of the lawyer was softened by the grateful emotion that rose within him. ‘ God be merciful to me a sinner !’ That was his humble cry just now.

'Let the way be hard, dear Lord; my great neglect deserveth no indulgence. Yea, I would welcome a hard and cruel end, if so my sins could be blotted out. Yet not my merits, but Thine, shall prevail.'

Meanwhile Carlotta had met John Standish in the great corridor that leadeth from the courtyard, and to the usher she said:

'His grace bade me receive Master Standish.'

'What! is little Willie so ill?'

'Ill enough, Master Standish. I have nursed him these five days past. But can I deliver any packet for thee?'

'No; I am ordered to give it with my own hands—and promptly.'

'Come this way, then. The good Archbishop is now with my brother.'

Carlotta tripped up the stairs so fast, that the heavy squire had some ado to keep her in sight.

'Well, daughter, hast thou any letter?'

A heavy step and hard breathing apprised the Archbishop that the messenger was at hand.

'Ah! my old friend, John Standish!'

They grasped each other's hands, but the elder said:

'There is some ill news stirring; thy face tells me. Excuse me while I go to the window in the corridor yonder; mine eyes are growing dim.'

Carlotta, left alone with Standish and the child, said:

'Is the news bad?'

'I thought it bad—my mind was full of it; but in

this presence, Mistress Carlotta, the public grief is swallowed up in one more close. I, too, loved little Willie.'

She impulsively pressed his hand.

'Thou art always so kind!' And then, smiling through her tears, she added, 'I sometimes imagine thou art my big brother.'

Standish muttered:

'God bless thee for a good girl! I would I had a sister such as thou art. Stay! remember this, for time is very short now. If in the evil days that may be coming my arm can do any service, call on me as though I really were thy brother.'

'I shall. Thou art a friend indeed!'

She emphasized the word 'thou,' and looked with such pathetic questioning in her eyes, that he knew she was thinking of Alured.

He shook his head.

'He is with the rebels—poor fellow!—always too impulsive and thoughtless. The stronger will of an elder brother hath swept him off his balance, I fear.'

Carlotta put her hand to her heart and turned her face to the wall.

'Just Heaven! I am fairly baffled!' said his grace, returning with the packet of letters trembling in his grasp.

'I know the purport of them, my father,' said Standish.

'Strange audacity! Let me see! the poll-tax was to be paid by June 2nd. There was much difficulty in collecting it, and certain Lombard and Flemish money-lenders had bought it up by contract. Their

ministers, it seems, exercised their duties too harshly, and the people have flown to arms. Carlotta, my child, I must take Standish to my scriptorium. Trust in the goodness of God, which continueth daily. He shall snap the bow of the insurgent, fear not.'

Thus Carlotta was left with her brother, feeling the more dismay that she only knew vaguely what she had to fear.

'Now,' said his grace to Standish, when they were alone together, 'this is most serious news; and it finds us utterly unprepared.'

'That poor child, the daughter of the Tiler at Dartford—I knew her.'

'What! the girl so shamefully entreated by the tax-gatherer?'

'The same, my lord. When we were journeying to Stourbridge fair last autumn she showed me some kindness, tended a hurt I had gotten. A sweet, winsome thing, whom most men would have been ashamed to pain even by a thought. Poor little Merswynde!'

'That was on the 5th of June,' said the Archbishop, referring to his papers; 'the father rushed home and killed the brutal tax-gatherer, then he called on the craftsmen and labourers to aid him in case of reprisal. They seem to have marched to Maidstone, where they made one Wat the Tiler their captain.'

'A stalwart soldier trained in the French wars, my lord.'

'They released John Ball from prison, and marched

on Canterbury, where they met the Princess of Wales in her litter, as she was returning from visiting the holy shrine. Hast seen any of her suite ?

‘Yea, father ! the rebels surrounded her, to her great alarm ; but they did her no harm, save that several scurvy knaves took a kiss from her gracious lips. She spoke to them roundly as she dare.’

‘Then on the 10th the gates of Canterbury were thrown open by the townsfolk—ah ! my new gate would have taxed their powers—they plundered and burnt my palace, slew my steward, and then set off for London, where they are daily expected. Well ! it is an awful coil ! The King hath a few archers in the Tower ; Sir John Philpott and William Walworth and other merchants may lend us a few hundred men, but these insurgents march in thousands.’

‘It is not Kent alone, nor Kent first. I have myself ridden of late into Essex, where the origin of the revolt is, I think, to be fixed. Under a priest who styles himself Jack Straw, a large mob have crossed the Thames—I think they crossed before the 5th—and called the freemen of Kent to help them. I heard that this rising had long been planned. Every householder, under fear of having his house burnt over him, was ordered to repair at a given signal to some place of rendezvous ; and they came, we learn, some with sticks or rusty swords, some with axes and bows reddened by the smoke of their kitchen-fires, many having only one arrow, and that bearing but one feather !’

‘Truly a gallant company to overthrow a puissant realm !’

'These, having crossed the Thames, besieged all the roads that lead to London, and exacted an oath from all that passed that they would keep faith with King Richard and the Commons.'

'Ha! then they still pretend to be loyal to their King?'

'Even so, father. Secondly, they will have it that none shall accept any king who shall be called "John;" thirdly, that all shall be ready to come at a summons, and that none shall hereafter allow any tax to be levied in the kingdom but the fifteenth that their fathers used to pay.'

'Then I see they are killing all the lawyers they meet with, burning all legal documents, rolls of manor-courts and old muniments—oh! but this is past bearing! this is a monstrous outrage!'

'It is thought, my lord, that they are making for Blackheath. The King bade me lay all I knew before thee, and then ask if thou wouldst go back with me to the Tower.'

'Aye, aye! let me see! give me ten minutes to prepare. Meanwhile, go thou to my steward and chamberlain, and possess* them of this dreadful tidings. Let the castle be well looked to! Thou knowest our defences, my son. Great Heaven! how this thunderbolt hath come out of the blue. What day is this? my brain reels.'

'To-day is Wednesday, the 12th of June, dear my lord.'

Standish hastened to speak with the great officers of the household. The poor Archbishop staggered up

* Inform.

and down his scriptorium in an agony of doubt and anxiety. He looked at his books, his parchments, his little curiosities collected from foreign lands, and imagined them all crackling and blazing in one accursed conflagration. He groaned and struck his forehead; then saying, 'Ah! I forgot!' knelt down at his prie-dieu for a few moments, then got up, and with recovered coolness made ready to visit the King.

The royal barge swept proudly along under the powerful stroke of twenty oarsmen, for the King had sent his own barge to bring back the Chancellor. It was a still evening, and the declining sun, as it fell aslant the unruffled waters, gave a ruddy tinge to the river, and made it seem to those who lounged on pier and river-stairs as if the Archbishop were cutting his way along a sea of blood. Indeed, so marked was the resemblance that many cried 'Hoo!' and pointed with the finger as the boat went by. At Parliament Stairs was a large concourse of excited citizens, who had ridden forth from the City and were discussing the news in groups.

At Charing the King's falconers and equerries watched the barge go by in silence. At the Temple Stairs and in the Temple Gardens the lawyers were shaking wise heads in eager controversy. Some of the younger members raised their hands and cheered the Chancellor.

Simon of Sudbury acknowledged the salute with a courteous bow.

Lord Scrope's house by the river was barred up, so was the Savoy, so was Sir Simon Burley's. The

news had soon leaked out. In fact, all London knew what had happened before the King read his despatches ; for bowls and tennis oftentimes kept State papers waiting.

At Paul's Wharf an angry crowd hissed the barge ; they had just been ducking an unlucky Fleming. It was the Archbishop's first taste of the feeling of the Londoners ; he had never been hissed before, except on that memorable day, years ago, when he had stayed a party of pilgrims to the shrine of St. Thomas, and had exposed the emptiness of their religious pretence. It was the same at all other piers : at Queenhithe, at the Stillyard, at Coldharbour, and on London Bridge a hostile crowd hissed and howled and cursed the aged minister as he went by.

John Standish sat by his side, and held in his hand a billet of wood, which he used more than once as a target to shield his grace from stray missiles which were thrown from time to time.

When, with watchful eye, he had succeeded in warding off a stone or pebble from the Archbishop, the crowd cheered and laughed.

'Take note, my father,' said Standish, 'how the temper of the citizens is not cruel, nor yet angry ; for they rejoice when thou escap'st hurt.'

'I thank thee, my son, for thy great tendance of my person. God alone knows how this shall end ; I can only pray for the poor misguided men.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

‘WE have been anxiously waiting thy coming, Lord Archbishop,’ said King Richard, as Simon of Sudbury entered the council-chamber in the upper story of the White Tower.

The Archbishop bowed to the members of the council seated round the table. Amongst them were the Princess of Wales, the Earl of Salisbury (a staunch disciple of Wyclif), Sir Robert de Namur, the Lord de Gommegines, Sir Robert Tressilian, and Sir Robert Hales, the Prior of St. John’s, the Knights Hospitallers.

Richard’s face was flushed, and his hand trembled as he sorted his papers. His mother sat by his side, whispering now and then a word of counsel, and ever watching him with observant eye; while he was noted at the time to lean upon her advice with marked obedience, and to try by word and gesture to calm her feminine fears.

‘My lords,’ he said, ‘it is well known to you what is the occasion which hath thus suddenly called us together. The villeins of Essex and Suffolk, together with the free men of Kent, are in full march for London. They have burned and sacked the Archbishop’s palace at Canterbury, where, it is to be

marked, they were feasted by the inhabitants, for "the whole town was of their sort," we are told. It was their intention that all the rebels from different counties should meet together on the feast of the Holy Sacrament. Some of them entered the Church of St. Thomas and did much damage. With regard to our well-beloved Chancellor, we note that the rage of the mob concentrates on him; for as they mockingly parted his furniture and goods, they cried: "This Chancellor of England has had this piece of furniture very cheap; he must now give us an account of the revenues of England, and of the large sums he has levied since the coronation of the King." Well! I think we shall all lift up our voices in testimony of the good Archbishop's personal honesty and incorruptibility.'

A murmur of assent followed. The Archbishop's face was buried in his hands; he did think it hard that the people of England should lay the blame on him for the extravagance of the court and the losses caused by foreign wars—it was his entrance upon the "hard way" by which he should meet little Willie by the golden gates.

'To resume: after robbing the Abbey of St. Vincent yesterday, the rebels set off in the morning of to-day, the 12th, taking the road towards Rochester. They are collecting the people from the villages to the right and left, and march along like a tempest, destroying every house of an attorney or King's proctor, and burning all court rolls, by which they imagine they are ensuring their freedom for ever.'

‘There is one satisfactory feature in this great trouble,’ said the Archbishop, ‘and it is this: the temper of the people seemeth fair and placable, and even loyal, towards our royal master and his family. We must take advantage of this feeling. It hath also been said by some that the pernicious extravagances of the poor priests sent out by Master Wyclif have done much to stir up the spirit of disaffection. I do not say this is the case, but I do say that, having in our councils such known friends of Wyclif as the Earl of Salisbury, Sir Simon of Burley, Sir Richard Stury, Knight of the Bedchamber, and—may I add without offence?—our beloved lady, the Princess of Wales, we shall do well to make it appear to the malcontents that in treating with the King’s council they will be treating with some, at least, whose sympathies are strongly set in the popular direction.’

‘A very statesmanlike suggestion,’ said Judge Tressilian.

‘Pray, who may their leaders be?’ asked Lord Salisbury.

Richard replied:

‘One Wat or Walter Tiler, of Maidstone, and John Hales, of Malling, lead the Kentish men; while the eastern counties march under a priest who styleth himself Jack Straw; but they have also forced to join them Lord Manley, Sir Stephen Hales, and Sir Thomas Cossington.’

‘It is unfortunate that so many powerful lords are away,’ said Sir Robert Hales; ‘the Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, is on the borders of Scotland.’

‘He is as well away—they hate him most bitterly,’ muttered Richard.

‘Yes, my liege; but he is a strong man. Then the Earl of Buckingham is in Wales; it is a common report in London that he favours these people, and some even say that he hath been seen in Essex.’

‘A false rumour,’ said Richard. ‘I have letters from him out of Wales.’

‘Then, many English barons are at Plymouth, preparing for their voyage with their army. Alas! how welcome would their presence be here just now! and if the warnings of the Chancellor had received our due attention, we should not now be so bare of friends.’

‘It is needless to blame too late,’ said the Princess; ‘every moment is precious; we must concert measures for to-morrow.’

‘My mother is right. I see a messenger waiting without. Shall we not command his presence?’

A young squire was brought in. He was hot and dusty with fast riding, and evidently very excited. On being ordered to speak, he said:

‘I was commanded to ride into Kent this morning to get news. With difficulty have I ridden back—they come so fast. At Maidstone last evening they broke open the gaol; at Rochester they were much feasted, and advanced to the castle and seized the constable, Sir John Newtoun, whom they pressed to go with them, on pain of seeing his children killed before him. Then they moved on to Dartford, always cutting off the heads of the lawyers, and setting them on long poles by the wayside. They march,

shouting that they are armed for the King and the Commons, and by this time some of them must have reached Blackheath.'

'At what number dost estimate the rebels?' asked Richard.

'At fully one hundred thousand men, half of them unarmed, your Highness.'

When the messenger had gone and the council had risen, a deputation from the City waited upon the King.

Sir William Walworth, John of Northampton, draper, Sir John Philpott, Sir John Worth, Nicholas Rowland, goldsmith, Fiorentino, a Lombard merchant, and others, came to inform the King that they had held a council in the City, and had resolved to fortify London Bridge, and close the gates against the rebels; that already many thousands were encamped by Highbury and Islington, and it would be necessary to guard all the gates.

Such was the position of affairs when the shades of evening fell and the sombre shadow of the battlements and the ruddy glare of the cressets coloured all the surface of the Tower moat with alternate bands of black and red.

In one of the corridors Standish saw the lady Sibyl, all pale and trembling. Scogan, the King's jester, a young man of some poetical power and not devoid of wit, was trying to laugh away her fears.

'Heed not the ribalds never a deal, good Mistress Barley-sugar; for sure am I that there is one among them who cherishes a sweet tooth for Barley-sugar—he will suffer none else to mouth his sweetie.'

‘How knowest thou that, fool?’

‘Oh! Uncle Richard told me—the boy that hath power of life and death over all of us—he told me—he knoweth all our secrets.’

‘In Heaven’s name breathe it to none! I am undone!’

‘Pooh! little yellow bird, the gallant young rebel shall yet be King.’

‘Think’st thou so in earnest? On what grounds?’

‘Why, truly, on English grounds. He hath a hundred thousand odoriferous losels* and draw-latches† at his heels.’

‘But it is full parlous‡ for him. “King,” saidst thou?’

‘I’ll swear he shall have a crown. I am for good master—we ken who—as well as thou. But hush! breathe it not, even with scented breath.’

‘I shall be mum as a mouse—but, oh! my heart doth flutter so wildly.’

‘As Dan Chaucer saith, “The season pricketh every gentle heart;” but cheer thee!’

“Holy water and bread shall drive away the devil;
Blessings and black beads will help in every evil.”

Scogan passed down the corridor towards Standish, and holding his coxcomb and jingling his bells to prevent Sibyl hearing, he said:

‘That young woman lacks someone to look after her, Master Standish. She is likely enough to try and open the gates to the enemy.’

‘Impossible!’ murmured Standish, and stepped

* Loose fellows.

† Burglars.

‡ Perilous.

towards the maid-of-honour. 'Thou hast a fearsome look, lady Sibyl, and dost not regard me with so kind a glance as thou usest. Sure fear makes thee distraught.'

'Perchance it doth. This is a terrible hour!—so much anxiety and perplexity. Hast heard aught of any of the rebel leaders?'

'I know that my whilom friend, Alured of Dene, is even now at Islington. The poor fool! Is it not sad—sad for him and for Carlotta?'

'Carlotta, indeed! He hath broken with that simple lass long ago.'

'Indeed! Hast thou heard from him, or from her?'

Sibyl blushed. Fortunately for her the corridor was dark, and Standish did not mark it.

'Have the people much chance, think'st thou?' she asked.

'Every chance, lady Sibyl. They are strong in numbers and purpose. We are weak in both, I fear. But they profess to be loyal to the King, and that is a great thing.'

'Oh! but will they not set up a new king, if they succeed in their hopes?'

'Well! that may be the end of it. You see, mobs are fickle. They seldom can control their own mighty impulse. They may begin by being loyal; they may end by rank treason.'

'Yea, in good sooth!'

Sibyl, with her finger to her lip, was plunged in deep thought.

At length Standish said:

‘If danger should come near thee, Sibyl, thou canst count on me.’

‘Thanks, Master Standish. An I need thee, I shall send for thee.’

And without a look of thanks she turned and re-entered the bower.

“Master Standish!”—she said “Master,” and looked as cold as ice. What have I done to anger her? Oh! that I could prove my love—my unreasoning, blind love—by facing peril for her sake!

Poor fool! But are we not all of us apt to lose our heads with our hearts?

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE Archbishop* had slept, by the King's desire, in the Tower. The morning of the 13th dawned amid gloomy anticipations, for, late on the previous evening, after the council, Sir John Newtoun had crossed over, at the bidding of Wat Tiler, and sought an audience with the King in the Tower. The Earl of Kent and Sir John Holland were present beside the members of the council.

Sir John Newtoun had cast himself on his knees, and, after beseeching pardon for that he had been constrained to do this embassy, said :

‘ My very redoubted lord, the Commons of thy realm send me to entreat thee to come and speak with them on Blackheath. They wish to have no one but thyself, and they will not do thee the least harm. But they will tell thee many things which they say it is necessary for thee to hear.’

The King had said, ‘ You shall speedily have an answer;’ and called a second council to consider what should be done. The King was advised to say that if on the morrow they would come down to the river Thames, he would, without fail, speak with them.

Accordingly, on this Thursday morning, being the

* He had resigned the Great Seal at the evening council.

day called Corpus Christi Day, Richard heard Mass very early in the Tower, with all his lords, and anon entered his barge, attended by the Earls of Salisbury, Warwick, and Suffolk, with other knights and squires of his guard.

As they rowed down the Thames to Rotherhithe, a manor belonging to the Crown, Richard said :

‘ Which of you squires went among the insurgents at Blackheath last night ? ’

‘ I did, Lord King,’ said Standish, rising in the barge.

‘ And what is their state and manner of bearing ? ’

‘ My lord, it was dark, save for the glimpses of the moon, so that I had some ado to come by any knowledge of their numbers. I had dressed me as a simple priest, or Lollard, and landing at Greenwich I climbed the hillside towards Blackheath. It was as a battlefield, where all the woodland is strewn with dead bodies. For they lay on sleep, just as they had thrown themselves down on the grass or in the underwood. Yet here and there crouched a group round a crackling fire, talking with bated breath about what should come on the morrow ; whom, when I questioned, as though I, too, were a rebel, it gave me matter for wonder that no preparations had been made to feed so large a multitude. Fully one-fourth of them—so they said—fasted for want of meat, as these had not brought any with them in scrip or wallet ; and they were much vexed, as your Highness may suppose.’

‘ Strange want of foresight ! ’ said Earl Warwick.

‘ They shall be sharp set this morn,’ said the Arch-



STARTING TO CONFER WITH THE REBELS.

bishop with a thin smile ; 'and it bodes ill for the temper we shall find them in. I have ever been against this conference, my lords. I pray you, permit not thy King to run any hazard of being entrapped by these men.'

'I, too, am vehemently opposed to this mad enterprise,' said Sir Robert Hales, the Master of the Knights Hospitallers, and Treasurer of the Kingdom.

'We are all fully armed under our coats in good mail,' said Richard.

'Yea,' said the treasurer ; 'but what shall armour avail if the barge once touch land, and our persons be seized by the mad churls ?'

It certainly looked a foolish business, and when now Rotherhithe came into view, and they could descry a mighty concourse of folk, with two banners of St. George and sixty pennons, crowding near the shore, the rowers were ordered to lay on their oars. The sunlight lit up the scene full joyously ; the water sparkled and glinted, and the silver drops that fell from the raised oars looked like beads of silver. The waiting crowd no sooner saw the royal barge approaching than the great hoarse hum of ten thousand voices was hushed in expectant silence, save that here one and there another called to his neighbour to admire the gilded prow of the barge, the burnished steel of the knights' shields, the gold chain that gleamed against the black velvet gown of the Lord Treasurer, and—as the great barge swung nearer to the shore—the jewelled gloves of the Archbishop.

Those in the barge then saw that two mounted men rode forth, waving back the people from the

bank. Of these one was Sir John Newtoun; the other was unknown to them. He rode a large black charger, was a strongly-built man, in full armour, save that his visor being up showed a massive face and firm-set lip.

‘It is Walter, the tiler,’ said Standish; ‘I have met him before.’

The two horsemen rode down close to the water’s edge, waiting for the barge to come to land; but the Archbishop had got command of the rudder, and would suffer the boat to come no nearer than a stone’s throw. Only when she had drifted past the horsemen with the tide he gave orders to put her about, and so backwards and forwards two or three times, yet never coming nearer, till Wat Tiler grew somewhat impatient, and the folk moved restlessly about, and murmurs began to be heard.

Then Richard stood up in the bows, his fair young face and ruddy hair all exposed to their gaze, and in a clear, boy’s voice he shouted:

‘What will ye? Hither I am come to hear what ye have to say.’

Wat Tiler returned answer:

‘We will that thou land, when we will discuss with thee, and tell thee more at our ease what are our wants.’

Then, when the lords looked from one to another in doubt and hesitancy, and the King himself had turned round to ask what answer he should make, the crowd surged nearer to the shore, their black, wild visages lit up by fiendish grins, as it seemed to those in the barge; the tide, too, was driving the

boat on shore, so that the Archbishop—what with his nervous regard for the King and his preoccupation with the management of the rudder, after bidding the oarsmen, ‘Back her down! Back her down! By St. Peter, we are all undone!’—turned snappishly—as was his wont when oppressed by over-anxiety—and cried in a strident, peevish voice, so that all who were near the bank could hear the words :

‘On no account ought the King to go amongst such shoeless ribalds. We must find another way of suppressing the arrogance of these riff-raff.’

‘Shoeless ribalds! Fatal words, my Lord Archbishop, on this 13th of June.’

‘Shoeless ribalds!’ The bitter words were repeated from mouth to mouth along the shore and across the meadows, until one mighty roar of sound rose in angry discord, and many a cheek blenched within the royal barge: so fierce and terrible a yell for vengeance went up to heaven.

Still, Wat Tiler would give the King one more chance, though his brow had darkened at the Archbishop’s taunt.

‘I am ready to grant the King a safe pass. Nay, I will myself conduct him to the place of meeting in all honesty.’

But the Earl of Salisbury stood up in the side of the barge and cried—and the quiet sarcasm of his tone bit even deeper than the peevish taunt of the Chancellor :

‘Gentlemen, you are not properly dressed, nor in a fit condition for the King to talk with you.’

A second howl of disappointed rage went up from the crowd, and threatening gestures made it expedient to row out into midstream. As the barge swung round, they plainly heard it shouted :

‘ We swear to seek out the King’s betrayers, and chop off their cursed heads!’

None spake in the royal retinue as they rowed at full speed for the Tower. It had been a scene which might have terrified the boldest warrior—for the angry shout of a great multitude hath something thrilling in its savage discord—yet had the young King shown no symptom of cowardice. Nay, he had met the insurgent leader boldly, and there had been no tremor in his voice, no paleness in his cheek. But as they hasted home, he nestled closely into the concealing folds of the Archbishop’s gown, and, with a little shudder, whispered :

‘ Oh ! my poor mother !’

Then Simon of Sudbury, holding the boy’s hand, put his head down and murmured such words of religious comfort as might stay his young heart ; and the boy’s bosom swelled till he could bear his grief to himself no longer, but gently sobbed unseen.

‘ Poor child ! he hath been overwrought !’

It was only a common archer who murmured that to his neighbour. But archer or lord, there was not one just then who would not have given his life for Richard.

All through the morning of that pleasant summer day there was a tramping of many feet along the roads that led to Southwark. For those who had

gathered to Rotherhithe hasted back to Blackheath, carrying Wat Tiler's order to march on London.

On Horsely Down they stood at gaze, seeing all the fair prospect before them—the winding river, the great white tower from which blew the royal banner, the City with its walls and turreted gates, the upward sloping fields of Islington and Highgate, and away to the left the great Abbey of St. Peter's, Westminster.

They stood for a moment speechless, and then with a shout as of triumph, they ran at full speed down the hill towards Battle Bridge, where stood the town houses of the Abbot of Battle and of the Prior of St. Augustine, Canterbury. Finding the south gate on London Bridge closed to them, they turned with a yell to the Marshalsea Prison, and let loose all the prisoners.

Then, half famished as many of them were, they flew upon the hotels and inns, of which there were many in Southwark, and mine hosts of the Tabard, of the Christopher, the Spur, and the White Hart, were soon eaten out of larder and kitchen, while others rushed on to Paris Gardens, and were fain to devour the very bears that were waiting to be baited. And all along the southern shore, and across the water to Thames Street and the Tower, went such a din of baffled rage as made men think hell had broken loose, so stark was the cry of them!

On arriving at the Tower the Archbishop had gone on to the battlements with Standish and others. From this coign of vantage they could see something of what was going on across the river.

‘Yonder is the Marshalsea burning, my son,’ said the Archbishop, shading his eyes as he looked sunwards.

‘Yea, my father,’ replied Standish, ‘and yon houses nearer Lambeth are aflame already. Had I not best take boat with one or two sturdy fellows, and bring off Master Langland’s son and daughter?’

‘I was thinking of them at this moment—of them and my beloved household. If thou canst get leave from the lieutenant of the Tower, do go to Lambeth and see if thou canst save or bring off any, should the rebels get admission.’

Standish hurried down, and the Archbishop stood peering under his trembling hand up the river. But a few minutes had elapsed when he saw a dark column of smoke slowly mounting above the massy pile in which lay so much that was dear to him.

With a tear in his eye he tore himself away from the heart-rending spectacle, and repaired to the chapel.

Meanwhile, at Lambeth Palace, Carlotta had been sitting quietly by Willie’s bedside, hearing nothing of the news, but fearing something unusual must be taking place by the constant blowing of horns and trampling of heavy feet upon the stairs.

The boy lay moaning in his bed, sometimes getting a short snatch of unquiet sleep, sometimes growing delirious and needing all Carlotta’s strength to hold him down. And thus the hours of Thursday morning, Corpus Christi Day, ebbed away, until about noon the shouts of the rebels, who had fired the prisons in Southwark, reached Lambeth. Shouts,

too, began to come from over the water, for London Bridge had at last been opened to the men of Kent. For not only were the craftsmen in London in favour of the rebels, by reason of the tyrannical rules of the craft-guilds, but even three of the magistrates lent them their support. The gates, then, were flung open, and all the afternoon orderly crowds were passing reverently enough past the little chapel of St. Thomas, which was built over the centre arch. Reverently, too, did they salute the old hermit who lived in his little cell upon the bridge. And folk who did not sympathize with them said :

‘ Why! these good men of Kent, who come gaping by with such pleasant faces and smiles—they seem honest bodies enough!’

They had dined in Southwark, and were in good humour. Poor fellows! The most part knew not why they had been called together, or what was the object they had in view. But on the north side of the Thames they found all the houses open to them, wine-butts broached in their honour, and good cheer provoking their country appetite. The wine of the citizens swamped the little wit of the rustics. Very soon they began to cry for vengeance on John of Gaunt, and twenty thousand men started off down Thames Street and across the river Fleet for the Savoy Palace.

This roar of voices it was which reached Carlotta’s ears in the upper story of Lambeth Palace.

Willie sat up in bed listening.

‘ Lotta, bid the serving-men make less noise. My head is on fire.’

Carlotta had been thrusting her head and shoulders out of window to see what was doing down the river. She turned and said :

‘ It is a fire, dearest, on the other side of Thames, and the folk are crying for the bedel of the ward to bring water, I trow.’

‘ Let me see it—do ! I feel better now.’

She lifted him to the window—he was so light—and held him up.

‘ Why ! it seemeth as if all the Temple and Whitefriars were alight. The smoke and the flames, Lotta—see ! is it not grand ?’

‘ Yea, marry, ’tis ! but come back to bed and excite not thy poor brain. What doth father say ? “ Of little jangling cometh muckle rest ”—there !’

She laid him again softly on his pillow.

‘ Tell me a story, sister. I am all to-weary now the pain has gone.’

Carlotta’s eyes expressed her dismay. To be called upon to rack her brain for a story when London seemed on fire and the boy seemed to be dying, and there was no friend now to help her, was a burden indeed. But she feigned content, and smiled as best she could.

‘ Once, Willie, there was an abbot named Zeno, who saw from his lodge a gourd growing in his neighbour’s garden ; it made his mouth water, and he wished to rise before matins and steal it. But he reflected : “ If I steal, I may be caught ; if I am caught, I shall be hanged. Hanging is parlous painful. Humph ! is it ? On the other hand, the gourd is so attractive, and I may escape detection.

Is hanging, after all, so very painful? Come up! I will even try hanging first, before I rise and steal the fruit." So Abbot Zeno made fast a cord from a smoky rafter in his scriptorium, and there did he suspend himself by the hand and waist for five days. On the fifth day he cut himself down, shook his head full wisely, and said:

"No! I think not. The play is not worth the candle."

Carlotta looked down upon her brother; he was weeping.

'Why, minion, I meant to make thee laugh.'

'Alas! purgatory is full of thieves not so wise as Zeno. Oh! how cruel life is! and death more cruel than life! Lotta, I feel as if I were slipping away. Where is the Lord's arm to hold me up?'

'Thou art faint—weak and faint. I will run down and ask the potager* to make thee some gruel.'

At the bottom of the stairs she found all in confusion—servants and archers running this way and that, and heavy noises at the great gate, as if someone was battering for admission.

'Par Sainte Charité!' said the chamberlain to her, 'go fetch thy little brother downstairs, or he may be burned!'

'Why! what coil is toward, Master Chamberlain?'

'The fiends are broke loose, I think. The palace is surrounded by rebels who threaten to burn us out.'

'God's mercy!' sobbed Carlotta, as she turned to seek her brother. Hastily wrapping him in a fur

* Cook.

cloak, Carlotta was trying to carry her brother downstairs when she met Alured.

‘Thou here—and with the rebels!’

‘I never thought to see thee, Carlotta. What jewels hast thou there?’

‘My sick brother; help me to carry him down.’

Alured took the burden and bore him to the scriptorium, or Archbishop’s study. Then with a shamefast look he said:

‘These are changing times, and I have many men to control. Nay, do not mistrust me, and look so strange, as though I had forgotten thy sweet mouth and pleading eyes. . . .’

‘That would not matter so much, Alured; but thou hast forgotten thy devoir, thy fealty to the good Archbishop, and I fear me thou art, as men say, a traitor to the King.’

‘It is false; we are for the King, and, to speak sooth, it was to help my dear old master I sought command of this band. Some day, Carlotta, thou shalt know the purity of my motives. I must now go elsewhere.’

Scarce had Alured left the chamber when the door was flung open, and a score of excited peasants rushed in with yells and laughter.

‘Halloo! a pretty wench! the Archbishop’s darling. Buss* me, dearest.’

Carlotta drew herself up in scorn, and felt for her dagger.

‘Have a care,’ said another; ‘she hath arms—the little vixen!’

* Kiss, baisez.

‘I implore you, good people, let me be. There lies my little brother sick unto death; let me pass out, I beseech you!’

‘She is one of them that hate the poor. Kill her!’

‘Liar! I am a daughter of the people. My father hath done more for the good of the persecuted poor than ye all put together.’

‘Thy father? and who is he?’

‘Will Langland — he who wrote about Piers Plowman.’

‘Ah!’ ‘Pardon!’ ‘We crave pardon.’ At once every head was bared to poor Carlotta; she, they felt, was a lady indeed. Her they were now eager to aid, not hurt. ‘Long Will’ was their great prophet.

CHAPTER XXX.

‘CAN you get me a boat?’

Carlotta had been helped from the palace by some of her new-found peasant friends, but they had hasted back to secure their share of the plunder, and left her alone with Willie in her arms on the bank of the Thames. He whom she addressed was a monk of Westminster, as she could see by the keys of St. Peter embroidered on his breast.

‘A boat, my daughter? Ours is the only barge at hand, and we have been sent to help any that need succour from the palace.’

‘I am from the palace, Master Monk!’

Just then some men ran up, saying:

‘They are bearing off treasure!’ and seized upon the cloak in which Willie was wrapped.

Carlotta cried for help; the monk wrung his hands and fled to the river, and poor Willie was laid on the ground rather rudely, while the rebels stooped to examine the expected jewels.

‘Only a bairn, after all!’ they were just saying in disgust, when Dan John, the giant, came bounding over the fence, and knocked three or four of them over into the road.

The rest, seeing so gruesome an apparition,

thought the fiend himself was after them, and ran away, yelling with terror.

‘What! my own Carlotta! (Humph! I should say my somebody else’s Carlotta!) Hola! don’t cry, my child. I am here! and very much at your service.’ Then, turning to the men, who had just picked themselves up, he said with large rolling eyes: ‘As for you licorous caitiffs, I warn you to be off, for the sight of your round shoulders makes me wondrous hungry. I am passing fond of raw mannikin.’ At this he opened his mouth so wide that, fearing he meant in sooth to bite a piece out of them, they, too, fled away.

Carlotta thanked Dan John with a smile, saying:

‘I wish poor Willie was well enough to enjoy thy exquisite fooling.’

‘Fooling, lady? I like not that word—never was more serious in my life. Now to get this bale of goods aboard.’

The barge put out into the stream, and lustily the monks pulled against the rising tide.

‘Whither?’

‘I know not. Can we not convey him home to Cornhill?’

Dan John shook his head.

‘We will try, but the streets are vexed with other processions than become the day.’

‘Is not this Corpus Christi Day?’ said Willie, rousing up.

‘Yea, my little son; we shall take thee through the streets to thy mother. Don’t be afraid if we meet a throng of people, for you wot there is a great gathering of clergy and lay folk on Corpus Christi Day.’

‘To be sure! I mind it well. There were the Magi on horseback, and the bad men killing the little children at Bethlehem; and anon came the souls of the damned, dressed in leather, black, yellow and red, while they that were saved were all in white—— Oh! my head!’

The boy fell back in pain, but the barge went gurgling on past Westminster and Charing, ever getting nearer the blinding smoke and crackling flames, the flying sparks, and hideous uproar from twenty thousand throats.

The Savoy Palace had been fired. John of Gaunt was the name most hated by the rebels, and John of Gaunt’s palace was the first house on the north of Thames which felt the mad, popular fury.

Unlike most of the other nobles’ hostels, this splendid castle had its frontage close abutting on the river; its façade extended about one hundred yards parallel with the river; on either end rose a square tower having low archways at the base for boats to enter, each archway having an iron portcullis which might be lowered from the upper story. A massive square tower, bearing two turrets atop, rose from the centre of the front. All the lower floors were fitted for defence, the windows being narrow lancets, pierced more for archers’ use than for convenience of sight-seeing. The roof-front was castellated, with machicolations for the use of the garrison when they would fire down perpendicularly or pour molten lead upon the besiegers. The spacious gardens extended on either side of the palace, which, with its outer and inner quadrangle, occupied all the ground between

the river and the Strand roadway. A strong wall protected the whole enceinte of the palace. But the few servants left within had either fled or fallen at the first assault, for John of Gaunt, or the King of Castile, as he loved to be called, was away with his retainers on the Scotch border.

When the monk's barge was in the thick of the smoke, through which lurid flashes shot from time to time with blasts of hot wind, almost choking the breath, the sick boy started up, crying :

'Oh! mercy! mercy! Let me forth of purgatory! I hear the fiends yell! I smell the brimstone! Oh, how long this torment—how long?'

Fiercely rowed the stalwart monks, coughing over their oars, while Carlotta bent low to escape the fiery hail that drifted over them from the charred and blazing roof; so that without noticing it they found themselves suddenly in the bright sunlight and clear summer air, but also in the midst of a conflict of boats and barges.

Right into the broadside of a wherry drove the strong prow of the Abbot's barge, cutting it down to the water's edge, and sending the two men, who had been standing up to use their swords, head-first into the river.

The shock made the monks look ahead, and they saw still two wherries attacking one of the royal barges.

'Help, in the King's name!'

Surely Carlotta knew that ringing voice: it could be none other than that of Master Standish. She opened her eyes and saw Standish leap from his

barge into one of the wherries, seize his assailant with that terrible grip of his, give him a back-fall into the water, and then leap back to his own barge.

It was horrible to witness, but a strange fascination chained her eyes to the spot, and she saw one of the royal boatmen brain one fellow with a boat-hook, and cut off the fingers of a second, who had been thrown out of the first wherry and was holding on for dear life.

The others now fled, for they were outnumbered, but an arrow sped through the back of one of these, leaving only two men out of nine to get safe to shore.

When the first surprised greetings were over, the giant-monk asked Standish if it would be safe to go on to Paul's Wharf.

'Safe? utter madness! I have fought my way hither—every fifty yards. The river swarms with cut-throats. Return at once. See! there are more wherries putting out against us. Let us make for the Abbot's landing; they will never catch us on this flood-tide.'

Thus both the barges were promptly put about, and lusty strokes drove them merrily westwards. No one spake until they had again crossed the path of the conflagration, and again reached the bright sunshine. Then, when all the shining flood looked clear of craft, the two barges drew nearer, and Standish entered the Abbot's barge.

'The Lord Archbishop bade me take boat to seek the palace, but I (like a fond fool) must needs go first to Cornhill, thinking to find out most readily from Master Langland where his son and daughter



THE SAVOY PALACE ON FIRE.

were. I found the good dame standing by her door with her arms akimbo—thus—and her head defiantly tossed, and whenever any light losel would seek to enter for plunder or drink, she forced him back with a “Mark you, knave, this is the house of ‘Long Will,’ who made ‘Piers Plowman’s Vision.’” And when I thrust my way to the door, she said with a proud smile, “It is all well! the goodman has not been a-wasting of his time after all. ‘Piers Plowman’ has saved all my stores, my bowls and silver salt-cellar, my feeble-ale and apple-closet! I never thought to find the poem so much in vogue. Well done, our goodman Will!”

Carlotta’s heart laughed to hear this. She was so glad for her father’s sake that her mother had found something to allow,* something to take pride in; but she asked:

‘Where was my father?’

‘He had gone with Master Chaucer towards the Savoy; but he returned just as I was leaving the house in Cornhill, and told me how grave was the state of affairs in the City.’

‘More fires abroad?’

‘Yea, in good sooth! Thy father said they had opened the gates of Newgate, and were demolishing the walls; the Savoy, as thou seest, they have fired after first plundering, or rather destroying, the valuables; for they have put forth a proclamation, “Death to plunderers.”’

‘Ha!’ said the giant: ‘that is the first good news I have heard.’

* Praise.

‘If it last,’ replied Standish. ‘Then they were setting fire to the books and records in the Temple; and the last thing I heard was that they had sent a party to Clerkenwell to the house of the Knights Hospitallers of Rhodes, of which thou wottest Sir Robert Hales be master, to attack and fire the same.’

‘They shall meet some resistance there, eh? Those old warriors are not like to die like tame conies in a barrow.’*

‘Alas! what can valour do against overwhelming numbers? I can tell you I had a pretty time of it getting down to the river. The streets were thronged with them, shouting, running this way and that, casting blazing torches, praying, weeping, swearing. It was such a sight as I would not see again. Had not my ribs been tough, I must have been stove in when I met them bearing on a pike the head of one Richard Lyon, to whom they say Wat the Tiler was once a bondman.’

‘Ah! then private revenge begins to usurp the place of public need.’

‘Thou may’st say so. As I came along I saw divers Flemings and Lombards, men of great wealth and credit, stabbed to death before their own houses; some they even dragged out of sanctuary in church to murder!’

‘If they have done that, Standish, mark my words! they shall not ’scape swift chastisement. But—here we are at home.’

The barge had entered a narrow brook which ran into the river just to the west of the Parliament

* Mound.

House, and was called the Mill-ditch,* because the Abbot's flour-mill was turned by the water which ran through it.

Here they were landed at the Abbot's landing-stairs, and found certain of the brethren waiting for them with very white faces. But on recovering their giant safe, they plucked up heart.

A few French words swiftly passed. Had the monastery been assaulted? No! St. Peter had kept them as yet, but they were glad of any secular aid. Even a few inches more in limb and stature came not amiss to men who found their faith wavering in the hour of danger.

Carlotta was able to see her poor little brother bestowed comfortably in the little infirmary attached to the guests' wing, and—what was more—she was allowed to stay and nurse him.

Standish came up, before he returned for the Tower, to bid them good-bye.

'Perhaps I may never see the lad alive again,' he murmured, and, stooping over the delirious child, he kissed his brow. Then giving one hand to Carlotta, while with the other he dashed away a tear, he went from the chamber without giving her a look. So that she could not thank him as she would.

Rude and unfeeling such an exit might have seemed to a stranger. But Carlotta perfectly understood how the great sorrow within him had made him break away thus suddenly, lest his tenderness should have been too visible. 'He would not have me know how much he loves little Willie, and how

* Now College Street.

deeply he sorrows that my sweet brother must die so young.'

Carlotta's large eyes were full of tears, but not all of sorrow: for there is much in human sympathy which can transmute grief into a chastened content.

When Standish, after some little resistance from drunken brawlers on the river, and more serious stone-throwing from London Bridge, at last reached the Traitors' Gate and landed at the Tower, he found that a strange panic had seized upon all—from the King and the Princess to the meanest archer who manned the walls. Everyone was eyeing his neighbour askance, fearing betrayal. Only the gates were between them and destruction.

East of the Tower, in St. Catherine's Square, was massed an immense crowd of rebels, whose yelling made the blood well-nigh curdle. They were crying for the Archbishop. 'Give us the Chancellor! that he may account to us for his prodigal expenditure of the public money.'

Simon of Sudbury seemed the only calm and courageous man amongst the King's advisers. He recommended that a council should be called immediately. (It was now late on Thursday evening.) Accordingly the City magistrates were summoned; and they reported that the rioters were sixty thousand strong, but that not one in twenty was armed. Many were either in a drunken sleep or were rolling about the streets in a state of mad intoxication. They also said that Sir Robert Knolles and Sir Perducas d'Albreth and other great men had a large body of armed men within their walls. They could

easily muster eight thousand men. With these the rioters might be destroyed like flies. But the council, led by Lord Salisbury, thought that such an attack would be dangerous; for, if it failed, every man of noble blood would fall a victim to their fury. And they could not trust the temper of the citizens.

The poor Princess of Wales seemed to have lost hope. Pale and dejected, she wandered about after her son with such pathetic pleading in those eyes, which had once been the brightest in all England, that some who had shrunk from facing the rebels in their own defence felt impelled by chivalry to pluck up heart in support of the King's mother.

The Archbishop, seeing from the craven looks of the King's ministers that it was very probable they would fling him as a sop to the rioters, prepared himself for death. He first spent an hour with the Princess of Wales; then the rest of the night he gave up to confessions and prayers. He, like little Willie, was going swiftly to the golden gates; but Simon of Sudbury by a harder, bitterer way. For it was many hours before he could sincerely say, 'Blessed are ye when men shall persecute you!'—so closely, so strongly, like the clinging tendrils of the ivy, had the chains of worldly ambition and statecraft coiled themselves around his higher self.

But he wrestled, and got the blessing ere the dawn.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FRIDAY, the 14th of June, dawned upon a city given up to riot. In St. Catherine's Square the numbers were, if possible, greater, and the clamour was more imperious. Wat Tiler sent word that unless the King would go forth and confer with them, the Tower should be stormed, and every soul within put to death.

There were 600 men-at-arms in the Tower and 600 archers; yet, with a few exceptions, these men, used to the alarms of war, and trained in many a battle-field, seemed paralyzed by dread. Or was it that many of them secretly sympathized with the insurgents?

It had become known to Wat Tiler's men that the two ministers who opposed the King's going out were the Archbishop and the Treasurer. Some traitor there was within the Tower who had been holding communication with those without.

The clamour and the demands for Simon of Sudbury and Sir Robert Hales now grew so alarming that the King resolved to go forth.

Accordingly, proclamation was made that if the people would go to Mile End, the people's park, the King would ride forth and meet them there.

Then shouts of joy rent the air, and thousands began to wend their way to Mile End, thinking in their simplicity that the objects for which they had risen were well-nigh attained.

The King took with him a strong body-guard, amongst whom, of course, was John Standish. Of the nobles there went with him his two brothers, the Earls of Salisbury, Warwick and Suffolk, Sir Robert Namur, the Lords de Vertain and Gommegines, and others. As the portcullis was raised, Alured of Dene tried to press forward, but he was thrust back by a pike; then he contrived to creep close to Standish, and whispered :

‘For Heaven’s sake, tell the King not to leave the Tower unprotected! There is a scheme afoot to break in and kill my dear master. I have tried to turn them from it, but could not.’

‘Get admitted into the Tower, and warn the holy father.’

Alured fell back with a wan, sad face. Where were all his high hopes of getting freedom for the people, and honour—perhaps very high honour—for himself? He had been fondly deluded. The insurrection had degenerated into a drunken riot; justice had been abandoned for private revenge. He saw only ruin before him, and he had helped to bring about, perhaps, the murder of one who had been a true father to him.

Standish could only pass on Alured’s message to his captain, who replied, with a shrug of the shoulders, that the young King’s life was worth more than an old priest’s, and away they marched.

About sixty thousand men went to meet the King, who, on the advice of Lord Salisbury, promised them they should be no longer held in bondage.

‘Now, therefore, return to your homes, leaving behind you two or three men from each village, to whom I will order letters to be given, sealed with my seal; and these they shall carry back with every demand you have made fully granted.’

The folk were vastly pleased, little dreaming, poor dupes! that within a few weeks these charters would be revoked, and this young King, now so glib with his promises of freedom and pardon, would be coming amongst them with his avenging army.

‘It is well said!’ they cried; ‘we do not wish for more.’

Soon they began to disperse, relying with most touching fidelity on the royal word. But the unfaith which was afterwards shown them was not so much young Richard’s fault as the fault of his nobles.

As they were going, Richard shouted to them:

‘You, my good people of Kent, shall have one of my banners, and you also of Essex, Sussex, Bedford, Suffolk, Cambridge, Stafford and Lincoln, shall each of you have one, and I pardon you for all you have hitherto done.’

Then the King and his retinue rode back to the Tower Royal, or ‘Wardrobe,’ in Carter Lane, where he was to meet the Princess, his mother: for some had thought that this could be more easily defended than the Tower.

So Standish, who was burning to get back to the Tower to defend, at need, his old lord and master,

was compelled to ride off in another direction, a prey to the worst fears and anticipations.

Scarce had the royal procession passed out of sight when there was a stir amongst the rebels who still remained on Tower Hill. That something was in the wind the garrison could clearly see, for there were Wat Tiler, John Ball and Jack Straw conferring together. Soon these marched towards the gate of the Tower, opposite Tower Hill, and without any resistance the gate was opened to them.

Then rushed in flock-meal a crowd of gaping rustics, mostly from Kent, bent on sight-seeing, for the time at least, rather than on plunder or mischief. They stroked the beards of the men-at-arms, as they stood with their battle-axes and lances of Bordeaux steel; they even stroked the cheeks of the officers with their filthy rough hands, as though they had been men of wax and could not resent the impertinence. Neither did these attempt any resistance, but either stood pale and trembling, or affected to carry it off with a show of bravado, returning jest for jest, and hailing the rebels in such familiar words as they themselves had been accosted.

‘Why! how now, brave captain?’ quoth one scurvy knave to a dainty officer, who was point-device* in all his equipment; ‘shake hands—nay, kiss thy mate; for we are to be good friends and equals in future.’ The officer was forced to accept and return the greasy salute. ‘Thou wilt swear to keep faith with us, and seek out the traitors to the Commons?’

* Scrupulously perfect.

This, too, he had to swear on the hilt of his sword.

Others strayed familiarly through the private rooms of the royal palace, some in pairs, some singly, without fear or respect, as though the apartments had been thrown open to them by royal order.

Some, and not a few, even found their way into the Princess's bower, where, with her maids about her, she sat shivering with fear and shame.

'Why! here be the Fair Maid, sickerly! Come, lassie, gie us a kiss.'

With good-humoured but most offensive familiarity they went up to the poor lady, one after another, putting their hands on her shoulder, or round her waist, and giving her their loud kisses of garlic and London ale. The maids-of-honour, too, came in for much of this entertainment. The men of Kent sat down, they lay on the sofas, they jested rudely with the ladies, they took turns to lie on the royal bed, which stood on a daïs in the corner of the room, smiting it merrily with their thick sticks, and sometimes cutting a goodly piece from the sheets, which were made of cloth of Rennes, or from the head-sheet, which was broidered daintily with pearls; for these good fellows would carry home with them to their wives a treasured keepsake from their sweet Princess.

'Nay, mistress; fear us not. We would not harm thy gracious head.'

Above the bed hung a cage of gold, filled with cloves and incense and olibanum, all burning and filling the chamber with a goodly odour.

One ribald, on whom the strong London ale was now at work, accidentally smote this cage with his stick, scattering all the contents about the bed with smoke and sparks such as were full dangerous to see. The Princess screamed, and her pet dog rushed out of the clean straw where he lay to bite the miscreant. Alas! poor dog; he paid for his rashness by his life.

It was then the Princess swooned away, and the rebels, as if feeling some manly shame at their rude intrusion, one by one stole from the chamber. But in another part of the Tower the same good-humour did not prevail. Simon of Sudbury had remained in the chapel of the Tower—that cold, fortress-like chapel, with its bare, unadorned walls and massive Norman arches. Early in the morning the King and his ministers had knelt there, as the Archbishop celebrated Mass; but when they had gone he had remained in prayer, sometimes raising his head and saying softly to the priests who stood by :

‘When are they coming? What are they waiting for? For now would be the time, if it should please God, that they should come.’

The trembling priests and acolytes saw with wonder how calm and brave the old man was, and they wept. Presently there was a knocking at the door, and a voice said :

‘For God’s sake let me enter! I wish well to the Archbishop.’

The door was opened, and Alured of Dene came in. Wildly he stared about him in the gloom, then ran and knelt before his spiritual father.

‘Alas! my father! I am guilty of thy blood if thou flee not. Haste, haste! the steps of thy murderers are even now echoing on the stones.’

‘Nay, my dear son—my erring but beloved son. Let us abide here free from care. To die is better than to live, for never before in all my life could I have died with so clear a conscience,’ or, in his own words, ‘*Neque enim ante in vita nostra, in tanta securitate conscientiae mortui fuisset.*’

Alured’s face was full of anguish—anguish unspeakable.

‘Canst thou forgive me, dear father? Canst thou give me thy—thy blessing?’

The Archbishop stood over him and whispered a few words that the others might not catch. Alured knelt and wept bitterly.

By this time there was a thundering noise made upon the door, and cries were raised:

‘Where is the betrayer of the realm? Where is the robber of the Commons?’

Then with a crash the door fell in. The rebels stood gazing.

‘My sons,’ said the Archbishop with great calmness, ‘you are welcome. Lo! here is the Archbishop whom you seek—no traitor or robber.’

At these words they rushed upon him, but not before Alured, rising from his knees, had cut down the first and stabbed a second.

The Archbishop held up his hand to deprecate resistance. It was indeed hopeless; for Alured was flung down bleeding from many wounds, and the Archbishop was pinioned like a felon and hustled



THE ARCHBISHOP'S LAST MASS.



away to Tower Hill. When the mob without saw the poor old man, they set up such a yell as seemed scarce possible from human throats.

Surrounded by a guard of rebels, who marched on either side with drawn swords, greeted with sneers and contumely and execration, Simon of Sudbury marched to his death, repeating aloud the prayers of the office for the dying.

There were some, who saw him pass close, who were hushed into reverent silence at this spectacle ; women with babies at the breast burst into tears ; soldiers and citizens stood in the background gnawing their lips, but daring not even to mutter a word of condemnation.

A block of wood was found ; who would play executioner ?

At last John Starling, of Essex, pressed forward, sword in hand, saying :

‘ I am your man ; I should like nothing better, my mates.’

Then the Archbishop, seeing the dreadful preparations being made, lifted his head boldly, and with a warning finger raised, cried :

‘ What is this, my dearest sons ? What is this which you propose to do ? What is the offence I have committed against you, for which you wish to kill me ? Oh ! take heed lest, if I be put to death—I, who am your pastor, your prelate, your Archbishop—there come upon you the indignation of the just Judge—or, at any rate, lest for such a deed all England be laid under the curse of an interdict.’

Scarce had he finished these words when they

drowned his voice with a horrible yell of anger, shouting out that they recked* neither interdict nor Pope; the only thing left for him was to submit his neck to the knife, inasmuch as he had been false to the Commons, and a traitor to the realm.

The Archbishop, seeing that death was impending, after uttering a few words of pious exhortation, lastly having forgiven, as far as in him lay, the man who was to behead him, now bent his knee and put his neck on the block.

Then for a few moments there fell a great silence on all the crowd, men and women holding their breath for excitement, and some for fear at the horrible sacrilege which was being done.

John Starling of Essex, who had volunteered so ostentatiously to do the beheading, now felt a little nervous as he looked down upon the reverend head, and thought whose it was. But they were all waiting for him to begin, so he lifted the axe—he wished it had been a sword, the axe was so awkward—and brought it down somewhere—he shut his eyes, poor John Starling, of Essex, for he was not without his delicate feelings—but the blow, though well meant, was not sufficient; for the victim, instead of dying, put his hand quite naturally to the wound, and cried:

‘Ah! ah! manus Domini est’ (‘Oh! oh! it is the hand of the Lord’).

He had not yet removed his hand from the seat of pain when John Starling struck a second time and cut off the tips of the Archbishop’s fingers, at the

* *Minded.*

same time severing some of the arteries ; but he who was to go towards the golden gates by a hard way did not fall dead until John Starling of Essex had eight times lifted his axe, and eight times mangled the head or neck of the people's martyr. It was felt to be rather a bathos when Sir Robert of Hales and John Leg, a tax-collector, and William Apuldore, a Franciscan friar, were next led out to be butchered, for the most interesting sight had been the execution of the man who had laid on the hated tax, and who called the Commons of England 'shoeless ribalds.'

'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

So murmured a deep voice in the square ; it was William Langland ; and taking Master Chaucer's arm, he and Chaucer strode off speechless.

Hurrying past the Abbey of St. Clare, they entered Chaucer's house over the gate-tower at Aldgate, on the south side of the road.

'Come into my scriptoriolum, Will. Philippa ! a stoup of good red wine of Vernage. What ho ! bring it quick, Madame Chaucer.'

A stately dame entered with the wine, curtsying to Langland, and by her side a little boy shyly half hid himself behind her long falling sleeve.

'Ah ! dear wife, frown not on us for drinking at this hour ! we have seen a ghastly and a gruesome thing done this day.'

'St. Loy ! What is it, Master Chaucer ?'

'They have killed the good Archbishop yonder.'

'No ! Then Heaven help the poor young King !'

'Thou mayst say so, wife ; but I shall tell thee

more anon ; leave us now awhile. See how Master Langland kisseth the child !

‘ Ah ! ’tis full sweet to see one innocent face after that crowd of—of . . . ’ stammered Langland.

‘ Of black-hearted caitiffs,’ said Chaucer rather savagely ; then half to himself he muttered :

“ O stormy people, unsad and ever untrue,
Your doom is false, your constance evil preevith,
A full great fool is he that on you leevith.”

Madame Chaucer curtsied and retired with her little boy. Chaucer took out his tablets and wrote ; Langland buried his face in his hands and sighed.

They both heard Madame Chaucer say on the landing outside :

‘ Thomas, how was it thou didst not fear to go anear that tall, dark man ?’

‘ Because, mother, he had such kind eyes.’

Both poets looked up at the same time and smiled. Presently Chaucer said :

‘ Look here, Will ; shall not this do for some poem hereafter to be writ ?’

“ Have ye not seen some time a pallid face
Among a press, of him that hath been led
Towards his death, when him awaits no grace,
And such a colour in his face hath had,
Men mightè know his face was so bested,
’Mong all the other faces in that rout ?”

Langland smiled a sad smile.

‘ Ah ! Master Chaucer, thou lookest on all things with the eye of an artist. I would I could do so too. But the saddest thing in all this coil to me is that, though the Commons have done unspeakable wrong,

the Commons have right and justice on their side. It is the nobles who rightly are the cause of this bloodshed. But I foresee the nobles will get off scot-free, and the poor Commons will suffer worse than ever. Thou saidst just now their hearts were black; it is not so, but they grope in the dark: they do they know not what. May God in His mercy forgive them !'

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE King passed the night at the Wardrobe, comforting his poor mother as well as he could. Simon of Sudbury's body lay stark and cold on Tower Hill, for none dared to take it away for burial.

The young King was deeply moved at his mother's condition, and the natural instinct of love served to fire him with unusual courage.

'Saidst thou they had dared to offer indignities to our royal mother at London Bridge?'

'Yea, my lord, as our barge shot the bridge yestern-even, they hooted and cast unsavoury missiles at the ladies.'

'It was most foul and unmannerly, and the citizens shall rue the day!'

'Were it not better, my liege, to send some for the body?' said Lord Warwick.

'What body?'

'The Archbishop's. It lieth still where he was slain.'

'We have more tow on our distaff, at present. There is yet Wat the Tiler at large, and he presseth for an interview. The conference at Mile End fell out so happily, I am minded to meet this fellow at Smithfield. But what became of the poor Archbishop's head? Did they misuse it?'

‘Most grievously, my lord. They stuck it, together with the others, on a pole, and paraded it about the streets, and—the better to mark the Archbishop’s—they nailed his scull-cap to the crown. When they had played with them enough, they set them over the Traitors’ Gate on London Bridge.’

‘If we have good hap, Wat Tiler’s head shall be there before long.’

Sir John Newtoun entered the room, and said :

‘My Lord King, I have been to Wat the Tiler, as thou desiredst. I told him that his comrades of the Midland and Eastern Counties had gone to their homes ; that for the future all should live in peace, and that thou wert willing to grant the men of Kent the same form of charter, if they so pleased.’

‘Well, Sir John, and what was his reply?’

‘He said he willingly embraced peace, but it must be on his conditions.’

A murmur of indignation broke out among the lords present.

‘I showed him the charter we proposed. He looked at it, and said shortly, “It shall not do at all.” I conferred with thy council—for thou wert asleep, my lord—and we offered him an amended charter. “Tush!” quoth he; “it shall never do thus.” A third charter was drawn up, with offers more liberal. He laughed, and said, “Tear it up! We must have a full commission to behead all lawyers and such as are learned in the law.” Then, putting his hand to his mouth, he added insolently, “Before four days shall have passed, all the laws of England shall emanate from my lips!”’

‘Insolent indeed! This fellow’s arrogance passeth all bounds. But, with the consent of my council, I propose to meet him in Smithfield—there we shall have room for our guard to act, if necessary—and if a bold bearing can bring him to listen to reason, he shall see it in me. For I am much hurt at my mother’s treatment.’

It was accordingly arranged that Richard should ride to Smithfield with a carefully selected escort of well-armed knights and soldiers. But the Princess begged her son to go to Westminster first and consult the hermit who lived by the Abbey Church; therefore Standish was sent off, with other squires, to apprise this holy man of the royal visit by which he was to be honoured.

After seeing the hermit, Standish went through the ‘Elms,’ or wide park on the north of the monks’ buildings, towards the almonry and guests’ lodge. Here he sent in word that he would fain see Carlotta.

She came down to the locutorium, or parlour, and Standish read in the calm sorrow of her face that all was over.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘he passed away in his sleep yesterday, after sext.* All the morning he had been wandering in thought, oftentimes imagining he was in church, a-singing of the psalms—and, indeed, Master Infirmarius fetched in some of the monks, in especial his old tutor, the Master of the Novices, to hear how sweetly he sang the canticles. It was as though he sat in his stall in the choir. The notes were less thrilling than was their wont, Master

* Noon.

Standish, but so sweet and full of melody! They seemed to be coming from a great way off, if you shut your eyes. You could almost fancy the dear child was singing to you out of heaven. I tell thee, they all wept at the sound.' Here the memory of that moment overcame Carlotta's fortitude. But she soon recovered her placid self-possession, and went on: 'It was about two hours after sext, as I stood watching him where he slept, his features seemed to change. A brightness, a most winning smile, came and stayed awhile on his face, and he murmured, "Hast thou been waiting for me, dear my Lord? Ah! I see the angels are ready to take me, too—me, too—in sure and certain hope. 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from——'" Here the poor little voice faltered—the breath had gone. And now—now, I have no brother.'

She sobbed and turned her face to the wall.

Standish felt as if he had lost a brother too. Many minutes elapsed before he made bold to say:

'They will bury him here, I warrant. So that thou and thy father and mother will have that care taken off your shoulders.'

'Yea, Master Standish; my Lord Abbot came himself to assure me of it. Oh, they are all so kind, so delicate in their kindness! No woman could do it with more tenderness.'

'There is another matter,' said Standish, fidgeting with his cap. 'The lady Sibyl bad me give you this paper.'

Carlotta ran her eyes across it.

'What! Alured of Dene lying grievously hurt!

He hath asked her to visit him, and she declines. Invites me to go, forsooth !'

'It was scarce in her province, seeing that she must wait on the Princess.'

'Of course, Master Standish, I cannot expect thee to censure her ill ; but it seemeth to me all too indecent to pass this on to me.'

'Mistress Carlotta, I allow* her not. To my mind, she hath not behaved herself wisely in regard to our poor young friend.'

'Stay! is he so grievously hurt? Then will I go visit him. My love for him hath long waned. To speak sooth, I have been fooled out of wit by his silken dalliance and yellow curls. He is in no wise the preux† chevalier I had thought him. But he is ill and unfriended ; nay, more, he lieth under charge of treason, and can have none to care for him. My conscience tells me that there my duty lies.'

Standish gazed upon the brave young girl with respectful admiration. He gave a little sigh as he said :

'Thy father hath many things to be proud of, but of none more than that he owes‡ so fair a jewel in his daughter.'

The tone was a little more impassioned than was usual in everyday talk ; but Carlotta simply smiled, and offered him her hand.

'Thou shalt be my brother, for thy heart beats true to one I love.'

Standish grasped her hand, looking into her great dark eyes. A little pressure she felt, as if he would have lifted it to his lips ; but she drew it away, and,

* Praise.

† Brave.

‡ Owns.

turning, hasted up the stairs. He called at the Wardrobe, and, finding that the King would not start for another hour, took boat again for the Tower.

There he had a short and painful interview with Alured, but comforted him by telling him that Carlotta was coming to the Tower.

‘I have wronged that girl so deeply. What can she think of me?’

‘Tush, man! in the presence of such anguish as thine, who thinks of wrongs? She knows thy double-dealing well enough.’

‘She does?—and still consents to visit me?’

‘Yea, because she is just one of God’s angels.’

‘What! dost thou love her, too?’

‘As a brother—yes, as a brother, very dearly.’

‘Let me possess thee of a secret,’ said the dying squire, ‘for my wounds will not keep me here long. The lady Sibyl hath not been true to thee, any more than I have been to Carlotta. See! under my doublet are some letters—take them—read them—ponder them—oh!’

The pain grew worse; the young man groaned and writhed in agony. Standish could wait no longer. He took the papers with him, and gave one of the servants a groat to fetch a surgeon,* saying:

‘Summon him hither quick, and say John Standish will be at all charges.’†

It was still full early in the morning—not yet eight of the clock—when Standish returned to the Wardrobe. The King was just starting for Westminster, so he hasted to put on his armour.

* Surgeon.

† Pay the fees.

On reaching the Sanctuary gate they all dismounted, while the King went to confer with the holy hermit, who lived in a tiny cell on the north side of the Abbey Church, just where St. Margaret's Church was afterwards built. From the hermit he and his retinue went to hear Mass in the Abbey, and after Mass he paid his devotions in the Chapel of our Lady. The coystriels* and serving-men, who held the horses, were listening open-mouthed while the porter recounted the way in which their giant monk, Dan John of Canterbury, foiled the rebels yesterday.

'Ye see, my masters, there was a heap of lurdanest† and churls all round the convent wall here, some crying, "Fire the monks' nest!" and others making a fearsome beating on the great gate, so as our good Lord Abbot and the priors stood wringing their hands in sore distress, crying, "Miserere, Domine; sauvez notre maison!" But it would have come to mirk ruin had not our genial brother, Dan John, turned all to frolic mirth.'

'Tell us how he did it, good Master Porter.'

'St. Peter! I had liever‡ seen it than the best miracle-play in London. The hurly-burly of the mob without was stormy and furious, when all at once our giant appeared, walking on the top of the convent wall. Eh! 'twas a sight to see his tall figure against the sky! They spied him at once, and everyone fell to keeping silence and gazing up at him.

"My brethren," saith he, with that quiet smile of his, and stooping forward as if he would tell them a

* Grooms.

† Louts.

‡ Rather.

secret, "ye must not carol so near the sacred precincts. Ye wot well the old proverb, 'The nearer the church, the further from God.' He who maketh play in the churchyard shall be far from the grace of God. Go home quietly, then, to your mothers, my little children, and tell them I sent you, if they shall chide with you. We know that you love our monastery and would not wish us ill, but that ye are tapping at the door in playful frolic. But ye are making too much noise. My Lord Abbot hath a headache, and would sleep; therefore——"

'At this point an ill-mannered churl climbed up and essayed to hit our giant with a stick.

"Ho, ho!" quoth he; "with naughty boys we are more severe."

'So saying, he got hold of the wretch and pulled him up on the wall. Then, making a full wry face of counterfeited wrath, he swung him by the heels in the air, his head making a large circumference of the circle, while the ribalds laughed and cleared a great space. Then did he let him down gently with his head upon the ground, to his much discomfort.'

'And did they go anon?'

'They forgot all their malice, and the London craftsmen, who are proud of their giant, would have Dan John show off his tricks of hand and voice—for he can imitate all animals—and so a merrier time was never spent by these same rebels, who had come hither with quite other thoughts in their frowsy heads.'

'The King cometh forth! To horse, to horse!'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON Saturday morning, the 15th of June, Wat Tiler rode off with twenty thousand men on foot to meet the King at Smithfield. Twenty thousand were all he could muster now; for many had gone home, and many would tarry by the ale, a-drinking of Rhenish and Malmsey Madeira wines, or eating themselves stupid at the now empty houses of the Lombards, with nothing to pay.

Was there ever such a millennium for over-swinked* labourers? Amongst Wat Tiler's party were some that had the King's banners, given them by order on the previous evening; but though they held in their hands the royal pledge of freedom and pardon, they were much more for staying in London, where such good cheer was to be had, than for going to their own miserable homes.

Before the Abbey of St. Bartholomew they halted to wait for this boy who styled himself King of England.

'We were better employed pillaging the Flemings than tarrying here out in the fields,' said one, grumbling to Wat Tiler.

'There is no haste. Walker and Lister shall not

* Overworked.

arrive from the Eastern Counties yet awhile. We shall have first pickings.'

'I prythee, good leader,' said John Tickle, doublet-maker of London, 'resolve me this more surely. I have provided thy knaves with sixty doublets, the which are worth fully thirty marks. I would fain know from whom I am to recover these moneys?'

'Make thyself easy, man,' replied Tiler; 'thou shalt be well paid this day; look to me for it. Thou hast security enough for them.'

'Lo, where cometh the King yonder!' cried a scout.

Richard, with a retinue of sixty horsemen, was seen galloping across the grass towards them; when he saw how many they were, he drew rein at some little distance from the rebels.

On seeing this, Wat Tiler said to his men:

'Here is the King. I will go and speak with him. Do not you stir from hence until I give you a signal.'

He then made a motion with his hand, and added:

'When you shall see me make this sign, then step forward and kill everyone except the King; but hurt him not, for he is young, and we can do what we please with him; for by carrying him through England we shall be lords of it without any opposition.'

With these words he spurred and reined in his horse, so that it reared and curvetted right royally as he cantered towards the King. So near did he ride that the head of the black charger touched the crupper of the King's horse.

‘King, dost thou see all those men there?’

‘Yes. Why dost thou ask?’

‘Because they are all under my command, and have sworn by their faith and loyalty to do whatever I shall order.’

‘Very well. I have no objections to it.’

Richard’s voice sounded to his own men rather tremulous. The boy was a little daunted at the rebel leader’s bold bearing.

‘And thinkest thou, King, that those people, and as many more who are under my command in the City, ought to go away without having had thy letters? Ah! no. We will carry them with us.’

‘Why!’ replied Richard, ‘so it hath been ordered, and they shall be delivered out one after the other; but, friend, return to thy comrades, and bid them depart from London. Be peaceable and careful of yourselves, for it is our determination that you shall all of you have your letters by villages and towns as it had been agreed upon.’

As the King was speaking, Wat Tiler was gazing sullenly round at the King’s retinue, and seeing John Standish on horseback, suddenly remembered how that squire had overthrown him near Cambridge. A scowl passed over his face, and he insolently interrupted the King and cried:

‘What! art thou there? Give me thy dagger.’

‘I shall not,’ said Standish bluntly; ‘why should I give it thee?’

‘Give it him! give it him!’ cried Richard.

Standish hesitated, and looked to Sir John Newtoun for a hint as to what he should do.

‘Give it him,’ repeated Richard imploringly.

Then Standish reluctantly offered Wat Tiler his dagger.

The rebel took it and began to play with it and turn it about in his hand, as if trying to devise some other means of raising strife.

‘Give me that sword.’

‘I will not!’ replied Standish in a voice of thunder, which made the blood tingle in Richard’s cheek; it reproved him so sharply for his weakness. ‘I will not, for it is the King’s sword, and thou art not worthy to bear it. Thou art but a mechanic; and if only thou and I were together, thou wouldst not dare to say what thou hast for as large a heap of gold as this church.’

‘By my troth,’ answered Wat Tiler, ‘I will not eat this day before I have thy head;’ and he spurred his black horse against Standish.

Before this, Richard had been hearing murmurs from his own retinue, that it was an unheard-of disgrace that the King should permit so valiant a young soldier to be killed in his presence; but when Wat Tiler pressed his horse against the squire, William Walworth, armed under his robes of office, rode forward, and, pushing his horse against Tiler’s, said in tones of anger:

‘Scoundrel, how darest thou thus behave in the presence of the King? It is too impudent for such as thou.’

Richard, catching the infection of courage, said to the Mayor:

‘Lay hands on him! lay hands on him!’

But Tyler addressed the Mayor, saying :

‘Hey! in God’s name, what have I said? Does it concern thee? What dost thou mean?’

‘Truly,’ replied the Mayor boldly, ‘does it become such a scurvy rascal as thou art to use such speech in the presence of the King, my natural lord? I will not live a day if thou pay not for it.’

Upon this Walworth drew his ‘badelaire,’ or civic sword, and struck Wat Tyler so heavy a blow on the side of his head that he reeled in his saddle and fell to the ground.

But soon recovering from the effect of the blow, which had only stunned him, as he wore an iron helmet, he rose and drew his sword. Then Standish leaped off his horse, and, without taking trouble to cross swords with him, ran him through the joints of his harness, so that the point well-nigh came out at his back.

Meanwhile, twelve or more horsemen had ridden between the rebel leader and his men, that they might not see what was happening. But they saw him fall, and one cried out :

‘They have killed our captain ; they have treacherously slain our leader! Let us make a stand ; let us die with him ; let us shoot and avenge his death like men!’

In a moment they had thrown themselves into battle array, with bows bent and arrows on the cord.

Then the young King astonished all who knew him by his marvellous audacity and presence of mind, for, putting spurs to his horse, he galloped right up to their first line, and, riding along the face of it, cried :

‘What is this, my men? What are ye doing? Would you shoot your King? Be not downcast at the death of a traitor and a ribald; for I will be your King. Follow me out into the fields, and ye shall have all that it pleases you to ask.’

The rebels hesitated. They unbent their bows, and stood, looking from one to another, half in shame, half in doubt. Some began to lay down their arms and slip away, while others kept their ground, and seemed bent on mischief.

Richard cantered back to his lords, saying:

‘Gentlemen, what shall we do now?’

‘Draw them out further into the fields, where they will not be tempted to burn the houses. We shall soon receive assistance, for the Mayor has ridden back to the City with his servant.’

Accordingly, Richard tempted the rebels to draw away from Smithfield, where were certain large houses and churches, and to make for more open country.

In a very short time Walworth returned with about a thousand men, for he had fortunately met Sir Robert Knolles and Sir Perducas d’Albreth coming with six hundred men-at-arms; and with these came also Master Nicholas Bramber, the King’s draper, bringing with him a strong force: these ranged themselves in order, and the rebels drew themselves up opposite to them, bearing the King’s banners, and seeming inclined to offer combat.

At a hint from Lord Salisbury, Richard called Walworth and Standish and Bramber to him, and

bidding them dismount, did there and then knight them for the manly courage they had shown. Sir Robert Knolles was for falling on the peasants and slaying them all, but the King would on no account hear of it, saying :

‘ Many of these men have followed the rebels from fear, and would be good citizens if they might.’

‘ Then let us kill two hundred just for an example, my lord.’

‘ I tell you nay,’ replied Richard ; ‘ for so might we slay the innocent and let the guilty go free. I shall have it proclaimed that no citizens of London shall hereafter hold communication with them, nor admit them within the City. Let them pass the night in the open air and in the fields.’

The nobles assented to this, but Sir Robert Knolles was in a violent rage because he might not have the handling of them.

‘ Why, sire, they would have murdered us if they had gained the upper hand.’

But Richard shook his head.

‘ Let them be, Sir Robert—let them be.’

However, he got leave to go and demand back the King’s banners, which he did ; and they gave them back, together with some of the King’s letters ; and then, feeling they had done a foolish thing, many of the peasants took to their heels and tried to hide themselves in the woods of Islington and Highbury, and even in wells and barns.

Richard returned with his lords and army to London, and invited his newly-created knights to come to the Wardrobe.

As the horses came clattering into the courtyard, every window was full of beaming faces, and one of the maids-of-honour ran to inform the Princess of the news.

‘Rise, madame, and dry those tears. The King hath returned safe, and is asking for thee.’

The Princess hastened into the King’s parlour, and, after embracing her son divers times, cried in her joy :

‘Ha ! fair son, what pain and anguish have I not suffered for thee this day !’

‘Certainly, madame,’ replied Richard, ‘I am well assured of that ; but now rejoice and thank God, for it behoves us to praise Him, as I have this day regained my inheritance and the kingdom of England, which I had lost.’

‘Now tell us, my son, what hath happened this morn ?’

The King gave a glowing account, amended by passages thrust in by his lords, where his own modesty would have slurred over his courageous conduct.

‘And now,’ he continued, ‘permit me to present to your grace Sir William Walworth, and Sir John Standish, and Sir Nicholas Bramber, my trusty knights, to whom we are so much indebted for the good event of to-day.’

The three knights kissed hands, and then they all went to dinner, and never perhaps were appetites more sharply set ; for the reaction from anxiety to unlooked-for success hath a power which maketh viands right merrily to disappear.

Sibyl de Feschamp had seen Sir John Standish presented to the Princess with glistening eyes. There was even a real tear in them, for she was not without feeling.

When the others were at dinner, she played so merrily in the bower that all her companions were enchanted.

‘Was ever Sibyl so happy in her jeux d’esprit!’

‘I mean to prank me,’ she said, ‘in my gown of changeable taffeta, with an under-tunic of scarlet soie, and I shall wear my horned head-dress to-night. I have gone woolward* long enough, friends; now my triumph draweth nigh.’

‘What triumph, Sibyl?’ asked Mary de Molyneux.

‘Ye shall see when I bring my new-made knight on the floor of the ball-room.’

‘Hath he asked thee to be Lady Standish?’

‘Not yet; he is so slow a wooer, and timid to boot. But ye shall see how I shall bring it about this very eve.’

Sibyl tripped off to the Princess’s bower.

‘What a merry, blithe creature!’ said one.

‘It shall sure be some Flemish† affair,’ said another.

They all laughed. Sibyl was liked, but not loved.

‘Madame,’ said Sibyl, as she knelt by her mistress.

‘Well, girl, make thy request. ’Tis a happy time.’

‘Wilt thou have the goodness to give me with thine own hands to-night to my betrothed, Sir John Standish?’

* Done penance.

† Tricky.

‘I did not know thou wert already betrothed, Sibyl.’

‘Well—as good, madame. I would surprise him by consenting suddenly to his oft-repeated wooing. If thou shouldst say, “I give thee, Sir John, a bride for thy gallant bearing,” it would be so delightful to everybody.’

‘And not at all to thee, minion?’ said the Princess, pinching her ear.

Sibyl blushed. They both laughed.

Thus, having laid her train, she ran off to dress herself, that she might be fairly accoutred when the time should come for her to take the citadel by storm.

As for Sir John, he first wrote home to tell his father of the new honour conferred upon him; then, like any eager boy, he ran off to the spurrier’s and bought a pair of silver spurs, in which he came clanking home to the Wardrobe; for to-night there was to be a merry gathering.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DAME LANGLAND could do no washing this Saturday night. She sat with her hands in her lap, a-sighing and a-weeping ; she had not even one cursed* word for poor Will, who sat by the window reading in his Bible. It was the only book he had heart for just now. For little Willie lay stark dead in St. Peter's Convent—her only son, his only son, Carlotta's only brother ! It was piteous to see how the poor woman softened in her great sorrow.

'Will,' she said at last, when the long summer evening began to grow dim upon the walls, and a friendly gloom made all symptoms of grief undistinguishable—'Will,' said she, going over to where he sat and putting her bony hand on his shoulder, 'we have lived together a good while now, and I fear me I have oftentimes hurt thee with my shrewd clatter. It repents me of the pain I have given thee, Will, now our little boy——'

'Hush ! wife. 'Tis I that should beg pardon of thee, for that I have been so absorbed in my studies as to neglect thee. And now, as thou sayest, when the Lord hath taken our dear little flower, we——' The words died down into a half-choked sob. After

* Crabbed.

a few minutes, he suddenly looked up: 'Where's Calote?'

'Gone with Lady Fitz-Warren and Alice and Master Whittington to take flowers to—to Westminster.'

'It was passing kind of them to bring her thither.'

'Yea; they will make a handsome pair, they will.'

The thought of Whittington marrying Alice turned the dame's pity from Willie to Carlotta. She heaved a deep sigh, and said: 'I went with Lotta to the Tower to visit the poor young squire. He was nigh unto death—could scarce speak. But Carlotta was glad she went. It seemed to bring comfort to the poor young man.'

'What a sad shipwreck of a promising life! Yet he redeemed somedeal his rebel folly by that desperate attempt to save his lord.'

'Out and alas! it seemeth all our friends are dying, Will. We shall soon be left in a world where none knoweth us. Poor Lotta! her hopes are in the dust. She will be as dull as dun-in-the-mire.'*

'Not so, Kit. Calote hath religion, Calote hath a sense of duty, and Calote hath love for us, and ruth† for all.'

'I care not a watercress for all and sundry. Lotta hath pleasure in religion; and I'm glad on't. But I am wonder-sorry that she hath been disappointed in her love. No man can take‡ this.'

'I wis she hath ceased to love this Alured for some time, wife.'

* A game played with a log of wood.

† Pity.

‡ Understand.

‘Yea; but the cause of her giving him over was fraught with pain.’

As Langland and his wife mourned and tried to comfort one another in their dingy house on Cornhill, John Standish was enjoying a merry supper at the Wardrobe. Yet in all the mirth and good cheer he sometimes stole a thought that looked sideways towards his poorer friends. Ofttimes he wished his old father could see him supping with the King, oft-times he thought of the desolate house in Cornhill, and not once only of the noble girl whom he had promised but this morning to take for his sister.

Master Chaucer was sitting at table near the King, and many a merry geste, or story, did he tell, which set the company a-laughing. But when the talk fell on the rioters, and what faith should be kept with such, his face grew grave, and remembering what his friend, Will Langland, had said to him about the peasants, he rather surprised the nobles by saying :

‘My Lord King, do just so with thy churl as thou wouldst thy Lord did with thee, if thou wert in his plight. I counsel thee that thou work in such wise with thy churls that they rather love thee than dread thee. I know well, where there is degree above degree, it is reasonable that men should do their duty where it is due; but, of a certainty, extortions and despite of our underlings are damnable.’

Richard heard him with attention. His mind was then easy to mould, and had not yet been warped by evil counsel and bad companions.

But the nobles generally scowled at him for uttering such folly. After supper there was carolling in

the Princess's state withdrawing-room ; and after the jongleurs had shown off their feats, and the mimes had counterfeited to the delight of all who loved good acting, Princess Joan stood on the dais at the end of the hall and called for the three new-created knights. She looked very stately in her blue baldekyn and hair-net of gold and pearls, and steeple cap of Syria.

There was great silence kept as Sir William Walworth went up and knelt, and being bidden to rise, received from the royal hands a cup of gold, as a token of the great gratitude of the King's mother.

So Sir William returned to his palace accompanied by a flourish of trumpets and a great clapping of hands.

Then Sir Nicholas Bramber went up and received also a casket of gold, with like civil words of recognition.

But when Sir John Standish was called, there was no small stir and tittering of laughter amongst the bevy of ladies that surrounded the Princess, for they were in her secret.

The Princess gave Standish her hand to kiss, and lamented that she had no gold bowl for him ; but turning towards her ladies she took one of them by the hand, and, leading her forward, said :

‘ But I am led to believe that in offering thee the hand of the lady Sibyl de Feschamp I am rewarding thy gallantry with a guerdon which thou wilt value above gold or precious stones.’

Everyone looked when Sir John would have smiled and offered his hand to the lady. But, strange to

say, he stood amazed and dumb. Then, starting back a pace or two, so that his spurs clanked upon the floor, he replied in a clear, firm voice :

‘Thy Royal Highness hast been much abused. The kindly recognition of my conduct I shall ever prize, but as for the lady . . .’

Sir John seemed at a loss to express himself, but the expressive shrug of the shoulders was more eloquent than any words.

The King laughed outright, and then of course all the courtiers joined in, while the trumpeters blew an ironical diatonic scale.

Poor Sibyl stood with quivering lip on the verge of bursting into tears, but her pride prevented that.

The Princess coloured deeply with anger and mortification, and in a low voice she said to her maid-of-honour :

‘How daredst thou presume to put an ape in my hood ?’*

‘Oh, madame ! He hath always over-pressed me aforetime with his vows. Methinks he hath been drinking, and is beside himself.’

The Princess said in a loud voice :

‘Sir John Standish, this young lady accuses thee of being in drink. Now, whether this be so or not, I may not tell ; but give me leave to say that thy rude rejection of my maiden, after having wooed her long, is somewhat unknighly, and from† the rules of chivalry.’

Standish bowed and put his hand on his heart, saying :

* To make a fool of me.

† Contrary to.

'I may have been rude beyond measure, for I was taken by surprise, my royal mistress; but meseems it that even in chivalry I have fair warrant for this, and far more vehement repulse.'

'Explain thyself; we would not condemn thee unheard.'

'I have heard, madame, of a young damoiselle whose heart was so light that she bade her lover go fight in his serk* to show his devotion to her. He went and got sorely wounded, so that the shirt was all blood-bedabbled. But that young damoiselle was strangely abashed when he commanded her to sit at table with his guests in that same noisome garb in which he had fought. So I, too, may have been rude, but I protest I have equal cause for my conduct.'

'What have I ever done in thy despite?' asked Sibyl.

'Nothing in my despite, damoiselle. Had it been my wrong, I would have borne it more meekly. But the wrong is done to another, to a greater than I—yea, to the greatest in the land.'

'Thou art besotted with wine-bibbing,' murmured Sibyl contemptuously.

Standish took from his bosom a bundle of letters.

'I here hold a packet of letters writ some of them from within the Tower. . . .'

Sibyl no sooner heard these words than she turned deadly pale, and ran towards Standish, throwing herself on her knees before him and saying, in a low voice :

* Shirt.

'Oh! give me them back! give me them back! They will lose me my head! there is treason in them.'

'I know it,' said Standish softly; 'they lost my dear Archbishop his head. You revealed what was said at the council. You gave the rebels through Alured of Dene important information.'

'Oh! wouldst thou kill me, Sir John?'

'I will not reveal their contents if thou wilt speak the truth.'

'I will do anything thou shalt command, Sir John.'

It was a strange scene—the musicians in the gallery leaning breathlessly over their instruments to catch what was going on, the mummers and dancers congregating in silent groups, the maids-of-honour clustering timorously about their mistress on the daïs, the King and his courtiers whispering together significantly, and Sibyl on her knees before the knight who had rejected her, holding him fast by his cote-hardie, and evidently pleading for her life: though none quite knew why.

At length Standish lifted her up and asked her aloud:

'Have I good warrant for rejecting thee as my bride?'

'Yes, Sir John.'

'Speak up, damoiselle,' said the King.

'Yes, Sir John,' repeated Sibyl in a higher voice.

'Was I warranted in rejecting thee rudely and bluntly?'

'Yes, Sir John.'

‘Have I in giving thee back these papers returned a great good for many evil turns thou hast done me?’

‘Oh yes! I confess it all’—she held out her hand eagerly for the papers.

‘Stay! I shall keep one for better surety. Thou wilt forgive my distrust, damoiselle.’

With that he thrust one of the letters again into his bosom and gave Sibyl the rest.

‘Go to thy bower:’ that was all the Princess said to her.

But no one ever saw her again in England. It is believed she was sent back to her home in Normandy.

That evening the Princess of Wales sent for Stan-dish into her bower, and asked him to inform her on what grounds he had refused Sibyl.

‘If I were to tell it should seriously affect her honour, madame; but if I may count on thy kind forgiveness . . .’

‘Cela va sans dire,’ she rejoined; ‘it shall be under seal of secrecy.’

Then he told her all about Sibyl’s unfaith to him and Alured’s unfaith to Carlotta, and how Sibyl had exchanged letters with Alured while the rebels were howling round the Tower.

‘It should certainly cost her her head, if the council should know.’

‘Yea, madame; and now I trust my conduct doth not seem so unknighly as it did a while ago.’

‘No; thou hast proved thyself more loyal to thy country than to thy lover. A rare quality in these

days, and we would well reward it in thee. Not but what, as a knight trained in all the degrees of chivalry, thy bearing lacketh something of kind courtesy. Thou art a trifle rough and brusque—forgive me this frankness, which cometh of a certain motherly interest I feel in thee. I would see this amended in thee anon.'

Standish thanked the Princess for her great kindness, and went to his quarters full of conflicting emotions.

For through all the hard criticisms which he had been forced to pass on Sibyl, a sense of pity would steal over his thoughts, and he was half inclined to upbraid himself for having brought such evil upon her.

'But I should have had to marry her, and she is as false as a she-fox! God help me! I could do no otherwise.'

With this verdict on himself he dropped asleep.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SIR JOHN STANDISH stood apart when little Willie was buried in the west cloister of the great convent, under one of the stones which he must often have trodden when he said his lessons to the master of the novices. All the boys were at the funeral, and all the quire monks, beside Master Chaucer and some squires from Lambeth.

Langland had protested he would sing the 'Dirige,' but he broke down over it, and sent the tears into Standish's eyes where he stood at the southern angle of the cloister.

'I shall go and visit them in a day or two,' thought Standish; 'they are very poor, beside being sorrowful, and poverty one can help, thanks to my dear old father, who never squandered a doit on deeds of folly.'

Accordingly one afternoon Standish walked down to Cornhill in his new attire, an emblazoned surcoat of green upon which was displayed his coat-armour, as was the fashion; his sleeves of damask slashed and 'slittered,' and his shoes carven with Paul's windows* made him feel, as he said to himself, 'a very fool for wantonness; but they shall perchance

* A phrase used to express shoes curiously worked and embroidered.

take some solace of the eye in perusing the goodly work of Master Bramber—of Sir Nicholas Bramber, I should have said.'

It was piteous to see how the stone houses of the rich Flemings had been gutted and spoiled in Knights Riders Street, while Richard Lyon's hostel in Cosin Lane was wrecked and desolate. But the citizens had returned to their work of routine, and scarce a strange face was to be seen in all the City. So marvellous a change had passed since the death of Wat Tiler. Once more the holy friars came forth, limytours* or listers,† to lisp before good housewives, and spread abroad a greasy palm of blessing with a 'Deus hic!' (God yield ye!)

Once more the busy pardoner with yellow hair and small girl's voice carried from house to house his wallet full of pardons hot from Rome, any one of which you might buy for a groat, and if you asked him to stay and dine, how easily pleased was he!

'A capon's liver and some roast pig's head is all I want; I live chiefly on Holy Writ.'

Standish smiled as he passed such a pardoner, for he minded the fun that Master Chaucer would make of such.

On reaching Langland's house, Sir John Standish found that no one was in kitchen or spence; but he heard the sound of voices upstairs, so he slowly mounted the stairs.

Now it happened that Dame Langland had gone out to St. Michael's Church hard by, and Langland

* Limited to certain ranges.

† Who go whither they list.

and Carlotta were talking together in the solar as Standish entered the house. And this is what he heard her say :

‘Thou wrong’st me, father dear, to fancy I grieve for a lost or disappointed love ; it is not so. I have long since found that poor Alured was both empty and faithless ; and as for the other, he is very dear to me as a friend, but he is far too sensible to think of one so far beneath him ; and I rejoice that he is so sensible. But it is the dark outlook for thee and mother that maketh me tremble and bewail. It is so hard to live now ; it is so cruel to see thee——Hark ! someone cometh ! A chink—’tis a spur !’

Standish had heard Carlotta’s words in a strange, wildered mood : ‘as for the other’—if it were someone he knew not, then he felt a pang of jealousy ; if it referred to himself, then it did not describe him with Carlotta’s usual accuracy. He hesitated on a middle rung of the ladder ; ought he to go down ? No, he decided to meet them. So he struck his heel smartly against the wood to warn them of his approach.

And when he entered the room he saw Carlotta sitting on a low stool by her father’s side : one bare arm, for her sleeves were short, was thrown carelessly across his knee. He never forgot that graceful attitude, the poise of the head on the stately neck, the lips parted by wonder, the eyes bright with surprise.

‘Ah !’ cried Langland, ‘this is, in sooth, good of thee, to visit us in the hour of thy well-earned glory !’

Standish was in the best of spirits. He talked

and laughed so loud that passers-by in the street looked up at the overhanging oriel-window and smiled.

He turned round and made Carlotta admire his new get;* he took off one of his silver spurs to show her; and then he sat down and told them all about Smithfield. After that he gave a full recital of the strange incident in the ball-room, during which Langland nodded approbation several times, while Carlotta looked up into his laughing, dimpled face with such frank, sisterly admiration, and heard the result with such a ripple of merry laughter—so musical from her rich contralto—that he felt at once all his reserve torn from him by an overmastering desire to say something he had never meant to say.

After looking intently in her face without speaking for some seconds, he suddenly asked :

‘Well, sweet sister, did I behave like a sensible man?’

She gave a little start. Had he overheard her conversation?

‘Thou wottest with some I can be full sensible, but with one whom I know I am stark wode†—not sensible at all.’

His voice and look seemed so earnest, that Carlotta was affrighted. Howbeit, she laughed and said :

‘’Twill not matter how little sense thou hast when thy bascinet is buckled on and thy lance couched.’

‘Nay, Carlotta, thou tak’st me not. Thy father is

* Fashion of dress.

† Mad.

here to heed me, and I speak sober truth.' Here he took her hand. 'I have marked thee now for many months, and have ever admired thy tender love toward thy parents, thy self-forgetfulness, thy deep religious awe, thy intellect and perseverance . . .'

Here he gave a little gasp for breath, and Langland nodded, saying:

'It is all true—passing true, Calote.'

Carlotta's eyes were wide with wonder and a smile still hovered about her lips.

'I never had a brother run on in this wise,' she said, trying to disengage her hand. 'Am I to be promised a place at court, I wonder?' she added ironically.

'Yea, St. Peter! thou hast said it, sweet maid. I would make thee Lady Standish, with thy father's consent.'

He kissed her hand again and again.

Carlotta gave a little sob and rose to her feet.

Then, after fixing her dark eyes for a moment on Standish, she turned and vanished into her bower.

The two men sat looking at one another in astonishment.

'Have I said aught to wound her?' asked Standish.

'I trow not. But who can mete the depths of a woman?'

Luckily for their relief in this suspense, Master Chaucer came up, fingering his rosary and bearing a good-natured, smiling face. To him they told what had happened.

'Meddle not with the unripe thoughts of a maid,

young man. Take my advice. Let her have time to think on't, lest thou be like my son Thomas this morning, who climbed up, when his mother's back was turned, to see how the simnel-cake was a-baking, and overthrew the whole of the sweetmeat into the fire.' Then the poet went on in verse :

' Calote arose, no longer there she stayed,
But straight into her closet went anon,
And set her down, as still as any stone,
And every word gan up and down to wind
That he had said, as it came to her mind.'

and then, nodding thrice, he added, ' Depend on't, she is brewing her ale, and thou must bide thy time.'

Master Chaucer and Sir John Standish went off together, seeing that Carlotta had bolted her door and did not appear to be coming forth again.

But before Standish went, he impressed again and again upon Langland that he should very soon return.

Langland went down into the hall, or kitchen, and strode up and down in a disturbed mood. He had called thrice upon Calote, and she had made no answer. What could be the meaning of such strange conduct? Had sudden joy turned her brain? At last his good dame came home.

' It glads me to see thee, Kit. We have had a full strange coil.'

' Why! what is't, Will? The summoner, I'll aver it !'

' No; it's Calote this time.'

' Sonties! what hath happed ?'

‘Master—I mean, Sir John Standish hath been here.’

‘Oh!’

The dame half guessed what had happened from the deep tones and long face of her husband.

‘He hath asked her to be Lady Standish.’

The dame took Long Will by the two ears, pulled his face down, and kissed him twice heartily.

‘’Tis not often thou art impulsive, Kit; but thou hast overshot the prickles* this time.’

‘Bencite! she hath not said him nay?’

‘As good. She left him speaking, and fled to her bower.’

‘Ha!’

Dame Langland thought awhile, as she stirred some broth in the large pot over the fire.

‘I doubt she loveth him not,’ said Langland.

‘We shall soon see, Will. Leave the matter to me.’

After a while Carlotta came down. She had been crying, but her eyes were bright now and full of a soft brilliancy. There was a smile upon her rosebud mouth, too.

‘So, my child,’ said her mother, ‘thy father telleth me Sir John hath had the ill manners to fool thee with feigned wooing?’

‘Feigned, mother?’

Carlotta gave a look of pained surprise.

‘But thou hast flouted him as he deserveth. For he is overweening with his new honours—the peacock!’

‘Oh! mother, did father tell thee I flouted him?’

* Target.

‘Yea. And I’m glad on’t. He be allto cruel and selfish.’

‘Mother, thou art much mista’en. Sir John is a noble-hearted, true knight ; and none shall say other in my presence.’

Dame Langland laughed, and kissed her, saying :

‘I knew it, Lotta. I only wanted to hear thee speak sooth.’

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SIR JOHN STANDISH went back towards the Palace at Westminster, where the King now was, in much dismay and perplexity. It was still early in the evening, and the apprentices were streaming out to Smithfield and Moorfields, to play at kayle-pins or loggats, or to practise archery at the prickles. When he reached Paul's, he found the cloister, which ran round the Pardon Churchyard, deserted and quiet. So he strode long up and down, musing on Carlotta's conduct, and wondering if he had made a mistake in asking for her love. At last he resolved to go to the Wardrobe and ask the Princess, who had shown such interest in him, what he had better do.

The page to whom he gave his message, asking for an audience, grinned in his face, and said :

'They all say, Sir John, that thou art the doughtiest knight in Christendom, for on one and the same day thou hast stopped a revolution and scorned a royal gift. She hath gone France-ward—'tis all safe now.'

Standish, who had often played with this same insolent little courtier, made pretence to draw his dagger, and away he ran.

'How now, Sir John?' said the Princess, looking up from her book; 'hast changed thy mind about the lady Sibyl?'

‘No, madame. But I have fallen into a tangle, which only a woman’s wit can unravel, meseems; and thy Highness hast been so kind and gracious to me aforetime; I thought I might come to thee for rede and counsel.’

‘My best thoughts shall ever be at thy service, dear knight; for thou art not as the many, self-seeking and false. What is thy trouble?’

Thereupon Standish recounted how he had gone to visit Carlotta, and how all at once, when he heard her sweet, pathetic lament for her father, and her self-denying neglect of her own pleasure in life, he felt that this girl of all others must be his wife; how he had tried to ask her as delicately as he could, but delicate windings of speech were never for him to master, and so, perhaps, he had blurted it out so as to give her hurt. In short, she had fled and left him without an answer.

‘So! this fits in with thy quick repulse of the faithless Sibyl.’

‘I crave thy grace, no. I had not thought of Master Langland’s daughter when I rejected the lady Sibyl.’

‘Well! I must see her, I suppose. She is the same dark maid I had speech with once when Master Chaucer brought her hither. I mind me now: tall, stately, a long neck, fine eyes and dark, not a fool, I should think, from her vivacious replies.’

‘A very intelligent maiden—and that is what my father would value; for he still chideth with me for that I read little in books.’

The Princess smiled, and said :

‘ It is a good old custom—to choose a wife such as a wise parent would value. But hast thou considered what the old knight would think of her lack of dowry ?’

‘ I have taken thought on it, madame, and it giveth me unrest.’

‘ Let it do so no longer. We are much beholden to thee, Sir John. If we find the girl loveth thee, we shall find her a suitable dowry.’

Standish thanked the Princess in his frank and somewhat blundering way, kissed hands and retired, after having been ordered to call on the morrow before tierce.*

The next day, about eight in the morning, a whirlicote† stopped at Langland’s door, and two men in the royal livery presented themselves, much to the surprise of the simple inmates.

‘ It is a letter from the chamberlain of her Highness, commanding the attendance of Mistress Carlotta Langland,’ said her father.

Instantly the dame left off stirring of her sippet-brewis, and ran upstairs to Carlotta.

‘ Leave copying of that stuff, child, and do on thy bravest attire.’

‘ St. Loy, mother ! what is toward ?’

‘ Thou art to go to the Princess anon.’

Carlotta blushed. She guessed John Standish had been carrying his trouble to court. He need not have been so foolish. If he had only come to see her, she would have saved him further coil.

‘ Thou art to come too, dame,’ said the equerry.

* Nine o’clock.

† Carriage on wheels.

'La! why, 'tis out of all question. My best robe is in the wash.'

''Twill be thought high treason if thou refusest,' said the man, winking at his comrade.

So the dame, much flustered and out of breath, pranked herself as she could and got into the carriage.

At the Wardrobe the dame was bidden to wait in an ante-room, while Carlotta was brought by Mary de Molyneux into the bower. The royal harper bowed and retired. Carlotta was bidden to seat herself near the Princess.

'Thou lovest music, child?'

'Yea, madame, with all my soul.'

'It bringeth us on our way to heaven. The good Bishop Grostête, of Lincoln, ever had a harper placed in a chamber next his study; for he used to say that the virtue of the harp, through skill, would destroy the fiend's might; and he quaintly wrote, "If there be such joy to be drawn from a tree, what must there be in heaven!"'

'I love to pray, madame, when soft music doth fall.'

'Yea: we can do little without prayer. Thou art a happy girl to have learned this lesson so young. Hast ever read any of Master Wyclif's writings? He saith wisely, "Who liveth best prayeth best; and no man prayeth well but if he live well."'

'It soundeth moral, madame; but my father will not give me leave to read in Master Wyclif's writings.'

'No? That surpriseth me. I have been used to

consider thy father half a heretic and half a leader of rebellion.'

Carlotta smiled.

'It is not in our humble home that the teaching of Wyclif is honoured, howbeit he seemeth not so black as he be painted of the Bishop of London. And as for this riot, madame, if thou couldst see into my father's heart, thou wouldst see how loyal and staunch he is to Throne and Church.'

'I believe it full well. But it was not for this I sent for thee, but to ask thee a home question. If thou lovest piety and worth in a man, why dost flout my new knight, Sir John Standish?'

'Oh, madame, when he declared his love, so strong a flood of joy swept into my heart, I could not bear any to see how I was moved! And, first, I felt I must go softly to my chamber and thank the blessed Virgin and her dear Son—that was all.'

'Ah! I guessed how it might be. Sir John! Sir John! come forth from behind the arras, thou simpleton!'

Then, as the Princess afterwards recounted to her maidens, it was full pleasant to see how he ran and clipped her in his arms, and how she looked up into his face with perfect trust, and said: 'Canst thou forgive me for keeping thee in suspense?'

'Yea, minion, now I know thy reason; and I would not have had it otherwise for a hundred marks.' Thereat he kissed her thrice, saying: 'I owe this to her royal grace that hath dispelled the cloud between us.'

And, of course, Carlotta knelt and thanked her

prettily, on being told how the Princess would give her a dowry. And when Sir John took Carlotta on his arm and presented her to Dame Langland, that good mother fairly wept for joy.

Now, as she kept long silence when they rode homewards, Carlotta put her arm about her mother's neck, and said :

‘Thou art grieving, mother, at the thought of being left alone.’

‘Nonsense, Lotta. Thou breakest in on my musing. I was considering what dinner we should have on thy wedding-day. Let me see! First course: brawn and mustard, and cabbages in pottage; a swan standard and cony roast. Second course: venison in broth with white mottrews—treated, of course, with almonds, milk, and white flour of rice—cony standard and partridges, leche lombard—the best, I trow, made with cream, isinglass, honey and almonds—and doucettes. Third course: pears in syrup, great birds with little, fritters, payn-puff and firmety; and, to crown all, divers meats brenning of wild fire, castled fine with paper and semblable waste.’

But Carlotta's eyes were wide open, and she saw, not a spread of cates and dainties, but a vision of the dim, unlooked-for future stretching out before her, and she was praying that God would make her strong to help her husband in all sweet, womanly ways.

THE END.



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